

MOUNT OLIVET BAPTIST  
CHURCH FINANCIAL  
CLINIC

Nathan Quick, D.Min.

B.A., Virginia Union University, 1998

M.Div., Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University, 2000

Mentors

Lewis V. Baldwin, Ph.D.

Victor Anderson, Ph.D.

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Nathan Quick

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Mentors  
Lewis V. Baldwin, Ph.D.  
Victor Anderson, Ph.D.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved:

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Mentor(s)

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Dean, Doctoral Studies



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**ABSTRACT**  
**MOUNT OLIVET BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**FINANCIAL CLINIC**  
**[INVERTED PYRAMID FORM]**

by

Nathan Quick  
United Theological Seminary, 2003

Mentor  
Lewis V. Baldwin, Ph.D.  
Victor Anderson, Ph.D.

Debt has been a problem among Mount Olivet Baptist Church members. The researcher addressed this problem by implementing a three night financial clinic. Members were taught biblical, theological, and contemporary strategies for reducing consumer debt. His objectives were to educate clinic participants in biblical and theological perspectives and to expose them to contemporary strategies for reducing consumer debt. The researcher used a qualitative research paradigm. He administered questionnaires, evaluations, and a survey. The researcher found that participants who appropriated principles taught in clinic reduced or eliminated their debts.

## DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful family, church, mentors, and all those who have supported me over my lifetime. Because of your unfailing love and commitment, I am who I am. Thank you all and may God continue to bless and keep you.

## INTRODUCTION

Today African Americans are in an ocean of debt. Some suggest that blacks are the biggest consumers in the country. From jewelry to expensive cars, African Americans are among the biggest spenders in America. Despite civil and silver rights blacks are once again victims of bondage. Bound not by physical chains but by financial chains. But no studies have looked at the black church to find out whether it can assist African Americans in taking positive steps towards consumer debt reduction. Therefore, a study was conducted by the focus group 'Economic and Spiritual Empowerment in the Black Church' at United Theological Seminary.

This study was aimed at finding out whether a Christian financial clinic could through biblical, theological, and financial teachings inspire African Americans to practice a wiser economy. The project presented in this document sought to address such as (1) Is debt biblically problematic? (2) Who is God? (3) Do African Americans have a history of economic trouble in America? (4) What role has the black church played in bringing about economic uplift for African Americans? This project sought to educate blacks Christians in biblical and theological perspectives on debt, as well as, contemporary strategies for reducing consumer debt. The hypothesis for this particular ministry was: if members of the Mount Olivet Baptist Church appropriate principles taught in clinic, then those members should take positive steps towards consumer debt reduction.

This document is divided into six chapters. Chapter one explains the researcher's spiritual journey and why this area of ministry was chosen. It also defines the area of

ministry the model seeks to address. Lastly, this chapter spells out the context of the model.

Chapter two discusses three classic theories of economic uplift in black thought. Next, this chapter discusses African American spirituality. Then, chapter two discusses the researcher's approach to economic empowerment. Chapter two ends with a discussion on debt and the Church, as well as, suggest a new model of ministry designed to address the present crisis within the African American community.

Chapter three establishes the theoretical foundation for the model. Biblical, theological, and historical foundations are discussed at length in this chapter. The biblical section addresses the question why is debt biblically problematic. God as sustainer, Christ as liberator, and the Church as servant are explored in the third chapter. Finally a genealogy of consumer credit is discussed along with a discussion on the economic marginalization and economic conquest of African Americans.

Chapter four discusses the methodology and design of the model used in the field experience. Moreover this chapter discusses the research methodologies and why the researcher chose them. This chapter is meaningful because it discusses the qualitative research methodology used in the research model. It lists the researcher's basic objectives for the project. At the end of this chapter the reader should have a clear understanding of what the researcher started with.

Chapter five discusses what happen during the actual implementation of the project. It also discusses the data collection methods used and the data analysis objectives of the project. The data collection methods used and the data analysis objectives will be expounded upon in this chapter. Finally the results of the model will be discussed in the chapter

Chapter six contains the researcher's reflections on the field experience. It offers a summation of the research model and suggests what should be tried differently during the implementation of the project in the future. At the conclusion of this chapter the reader should have a good understanding of the model.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**THE BONDAGE OF DEBT AND THE NEED FOR RELEASE:**  
**SPIRITUAL JOURNEY/CONTEXTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE**  
**MOUNT OLIVET BAPTIST CHURCH**

Chapter one explains the writer's spiritual journey. Also this chapter explains why the area of ministry was chosen by the writer. Last, this chapter spells out the context of the model. This chapter is important because it shares the circum-stances surrounding the researcher's birth, upbringing, call to the ministry, and the problem in his ministry context that gave rise to his present ministry ambition. It also provides a profile of the ministry context that was used during the project. It discusses the church's membership size, financial status of the church, and the ministry context.

**Ministry Focus**

The writer was born February 27, 1973. He weighed only two pounds at birth. Following his birth, the doctor reportedly said that he would not survive; and if he did survive, he would be mentally ill. Well, he survived that precarious birth and developed into a healthy boy. From birth, his relatives labeled him as special. He was considered special not only because of his unique birth, but also because he is a twin. His brother Quincy and he were born into a family that lacked religious grounding. During his early childhood he did not attend church regularly. On the contrary, he attended church

occasionally and sporadically with his brother Quincy. Attending church occasionally impacted him spiritually, in that it provided him with some spiritual grounding and religious reference that he did not receive from his home.

As a child he was an average student in school and never made the honor roll. However, he worked hard in class, behaved himself, and respected his peers. Unlike his brother Quincy, who brought home A's on his report card, he generally brought home C's. His favorite subject throughout school was reading. He would read books on poetry and history. He also participated in sports and extra curricular activities while in school. He played little league football, middle school basketball, and high school football. In fact he was a part of the State Championship Drama Team at Petersburg High in 1990.

The environment in which he developed did not cherish spiritual values. It was in the economically deprived city of Petersburg, Virginia that he witnessed first hand life on the wrong side of the tracks. The son of two worldly parents, Lydia and Thomas Quick, life for him was indeed special because not only was he born into an African-American culture, but a street culture as well. As a child, he was exposed to all the horrors associated with street life. From drugs to attempted murder, he witnessed it. For instance, he can remember being in my father's poolroom the day a demented and deranged man tried to murder my father. This incident impacted him because it showed him the harsh reality of street life. From that point on he was determined to do something with his life!

After the attempt on his father's life, his life took a drastic turn. He and his brother moved in with their Aunt Jacquelain. While living with Jackie, there came about in his spirit and inner urge to know the Lord. He began to attend the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Petersburg, Virginia. He would get up every Sunday morning and attend

Sunday School and church alone. This church welcomed him and treated very warm.

Although he was a teenager, the Young Adult Sunday School embraced him. During this time, he became familiar with the church, scripture, and God. The spiritual grounding and religious reference that he lacked in his early childhood began to vanish as a consequence of attending the church. One fateful day, his aunt Jackie asked him to go church with her and meet her dynamic pastor, Dr. Wesley K. Maclaughlin, pastor of Mount Olivet Baptist Church in Petersburg, Virginia. Dr. Maclaughlin preached a fiery message that impressed, informed and inspired him.

Not too long after that, Jackie fell sick and had to be hospitalized. The following Sunday, I returned to her church to ask the church to pray for her. It was Easter Sunday! During the altar prayer, Dr. Maclaughlin came over to him and said that God had a work for him to do. He was puzzled. Following the service he visited his aunt in the hospital. During this visit she and he talked, but he never broached the subject of his call to the ministry. While they talked her roommate began to vomit and cough violently. His aunt grew fearful and sought help. While she was gone the writer heard a voice speak and say “go over to the women and lay your hands on her and pray”. Obeying the voice he touched her and prayed. As a result she stopped vomiting and coughing. When his aunt returned she was surprised to see the women doing fine. Afraid he departed hospital and returned home. Upon arrival he went upstairs and bathed. In the shower he heard the voice again, only this time it did not instruct him rather it informed him that God desired that he work for the kingdom of God. It was on that day that he accepted the call to the ministry of our Lord and Savior.

He first shared his calling with his grandmother. Ironically she responded “I’ve been waiting for this day.” This statement shocked him. After sharing his spiritual

encounter with her, he told his aunt, brother, and cousin, all who figured prominently in his immediate family. They were all shocked, but supportive.

After accepting the call to ministry. He changed churches and began to attend the Mount Olivet Baptist Church. His beloved pastor, Dr. Wesley K. Maclaughlin, took him under his wings and shaped, molded, and guided him on the right path. Dr. Maclaughlin taught him important values as a young preacher. Because of his influence and example he enrolled in Virginia Union University and the School of Theology at that institution. This started him on an important path in his spiritual journey and academic preparation for ministry. His undergraduate and seminary training was completed at Virginia Union, leading to the B.A. and M.Div. His theological journey was bumpy at first because he was so young and unexposed; however, after meeting and getting his professors on the undergraduate campus, he adjusted and opened up to new insights and provocative perspectives.

The undergraduate experience really laid the foundation for him. It opened his eyes to academic areas and theological investigations previously unimagined. While at the undergraduate level, he learned how to be a part of a diverse religious community and to appreciate the views of others. The undergraduate years also prepared him for the challenges of graduate level education. The graduate experience proved to be a time of polishing and refinement as far as his ideas were concerned. During this, he became sharp and provocative in terms of his theology. Academically, he was stretched to the limit, mentally drained, and physically exhausted. Nevertheless, he became more than a student, rather a scholar and one devoted unceasingly to the life of the mind.

Three individuals contributed immensely to his moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth, they were his mother Lydia, father Thomas, and aunt Jacquelain Stephenson.

Although his mother was a worldly person, she envisioned a life of greatness for him. She constantly drilled into his head that one day he would be great and successful. She encouraged him to shoot for the stars. His never let him settle for mediocrity. On the contrary, she pressed upon him to be the best person he could be. Because of her encouragement, he has been successful in life. Her love and support inspired him to graduate from high school and college. Despite her death on February 27, 1999, his mother continues to be a source of inspiration and encouragement for him.

Though mother was a source of inspiration for him, she was a source of pain as well. It deeply pained him to see her overwhelmed by consumer debt. His mother was a big spender and undisciplined with her money. For the most part, she struggled to pay off her debts. She never lived within her means, created a budget, or developed and carried out a financial plan. Therefore, she incurred mountains of debt throughout her life and died indebted.

His father Thomas instilled in him at an early age the importance of education. For he, a school dropout himself, knew far too well how limited one is without a good education. So in his own special way he preached that education is the key to success and that knowledge is power. His father also taught him the importance of financial management.

For him, financial management meant three things. First, it meant to manage one's money wisely. He can recall as a lad the time he wasted all his money on junk food. Upon discovering this, his father sat him down and explained to him that money did not grow on trees and that to be mindful of careless spending, as he put it: "If you waste your money on penny candy, you will not have money to buy dinner". Second, financial management meant saving one's money. His father taught him early that for every dollar

you make, save a dime. Because his dad saved his money their family never experienced financial disaster. His dad always had money to pay bills and creditors. Third, his father taught that financial management meant to be debt-free. As a child, the writer never saw dad struggling to pay off his debts. This is due to the fact that he never incurred major debt. According to his father “Debt is money down the drain and something to be avoided.” Because of his father’s teachings he learned how to live according to his means, create a budget, and develop and carry out a workable financial plan.

As a young man, he witnessed how consumer debt impacts a person’s life. You see, his aunt Jackie was in debt up to her neck. His aunt, like my mother Lydia, struggled with consumer debt throughout her life. As a man, he can remember seeing her lamenting over her debts. She would often tell his brother, cousin and he, do not end up like me-broke and up to your neck in consumer debt. Jacquelain’s life was marred by medical, furniture and credit card debt. Jackie seldom had money to pay off her debts and typically “robbed Peter to pay Paul”. To see her overwhelmed by debt grieved and troubled me as a teenager. Seeing how consumer debt destroyed Jacquelain’s life taught him not to incur debt he could not pay off. As a young cleric, he vowed to help persons like Jacquelain who found themselves in unacceptable levels of consumer debt.

### **Discussion of Particular Ministry**

What led him to the point in his spiritual journey where this particular ministry focus is significant, was that today debt overwhelms the members of the Mount Olivet Baptist Church just as it overwhelmed his mother and aunt. Disturbed by this phenomenon and sensing a strong calling from God, the writer believed it was his spiritual responsibility to assist the members in striving to mitigate consumer debt in their lives.

Debt was a problem for members of the Mount Olivet Baptist Church. Many found themselves in unacceptable levels of consumer debt. Many were unable to pay off creditors or found themselves 'robbing Peter to pay Paul.' Debt was a problem that had to be addressed. If the problem had not addressed, then the members of the Mount Olivet Baptist Church would have sunken deeper into debt, lacked the necessary strategies for reducing debt, destroyed their credit, and lost their financial freedom. What was the solution? The researcher strongly believed that a financial clinic was the solution. His basic assumption was that a financial clinic could assist the members of the Mount Olivet Baptist Church in their quest for consumer debt reduction. Therefore, he implemented a financial clinic that would provide biblical and theological perspectives on debt.

The clinic was held at the Mount Olivet Baptist Church in Petersburg, Virginia. Petersburg is situated at the juncture of Interstate 95 and Interstate 85; just 23 miles south of Virginia's state capital (Richmond). The 23.1 square mile city is one of the thirteen jurisdictions that comprise the Richmond-Petersburg Metropolitan Statistical Area. Petersburg is the center of the Appomattox Basin regional economy that includes the counties of Chesterfield, Dinwiddie, Prince George, Hopewell, and Colonial Heights.

The population for the City of Petersburg is 33,500. It is an economically deprived city ravaged by drugs, aids, poor education, unemployment, and violence. Mount Olivet Baptist Church is located at 800 Augusta Avenue. Mount Olivet Baptist Church sits on twenty acres of land. Its grounds are manicured. The church's parking area is paved, well kept, lighted, patrolled and marked with special handicapped spaces. Compared to the neighboring buildings, Mount Olivet is Titanic. It is a massive building with wall to wall carpet, a seating capacity of twenty-five hundred, beautiful chandeliers, two large projection screens on both sides of the pulpit, radio and television broadcast, a

state of the art kitchen, a choir loft that seats one-hundred and fifty people, separate choir rehearsal room, computer training classroom, audio and video control booth, church office, and forty-nine active ministries.

The membership of the Mount Olivet Baptist Church is twenty-one hundred and is primarily a middle aged church. The membership is predominantly female, ages ranging from eighteen to forty-seven. Females make up 65% of its congregation while males range in age from seventeen to forty-five, making up 35% of its congregation. The income range varies in the church. Year incomes ranging from \$8,700 to \$21,000 make up 55% of the church; Yearly incomes ranging from \$22,000 to \$30,000 make up 20% of the church. Yearly incomes ranging from \$30,000 to \$40,00 make up 10% of the church. Yearly incomes ranging from \$50,000 to \$100,000, making up 15% of the church. The ministry context is engages in emotive worship and spiritual openness. Members of this enjoy good preaching and teaching.

Those participating attended the clinic for approximately three nights. Classes were held for two hour each night. Four courses were offered during the financial clinic. First, participants were educated in the biblical and theological perspectives on debt. Second, members were taught how to determine their financial situation and how to budget. Third, participants were instructed in how to deal with creditors. Fourth, members were instructed on how to develop a financial plan. The objectives of this particular ministry's focus were twofold: 1) to educate African-American Christians in biblical and theological perspectives on debt; 2) to expose African-American Christians to contemporary strategies for reducing consumer debt.

What was the hypothesis for this particular ministry's focus? This ministry's focus held that if members of the Mount Olivet Baptist Church who find themselves in

unacceptable levels of consumer debt appropriated biblical and theological perspectives on debt in financial clinics, then those members who participated in those clinics would take positive steps toward consumer debt reduction. This particular ministry focus related to the peer group focus in that consumer debt threatens economic empowerment. Therefore if Blacks resolve the problem of consumer debt, then Blacks would become economically empowered.

In closing chapter one has explained the researcher's spiritual journey. It has discussed the circumstances surrounding his birth, call to the ministry, and the problem in his ministry context that he sought to resolve with researcher model. This chapter discussed the motivating factor that influenced the researcher's present ministry ambition. Last, chapter one conducted a profile of the ministry context in which the research model was appropriated.

Chapter two discusses three classic theories of economic uplift in black thought. Next, this chapter discusses African American spirituality. Then, chapter two discusses the researcher's approach to economic empowerment. Chapter two ends with a discussion on debt and the Church, as well as, suggest a new model of ministry designed to address the present crisis within the African American community.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERARY ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: TRENDS THAT SHAPE THE PROJECT**

Chapter two discusses the economic theories of Booker T. Washington, W.E.B Dubois, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Next this chapter lifts up the writer's approach to economic empowerment. It also explores African American spirituality. This chapter ends with discussion on debt and the Church. This is meaningful because it illustrates that economic empowerment has been apart of the black struggle for freedom since the end of slavery in America. It reveals the economic theory that grounds the research model. It points out how the researcher adopted Martin Luther Kings, Jr. theory of 'Thrift and Savings as conditions for consumer debt reduction and economic empowerment.

This chapter gives attention to Washington's theory of economic 'Self-Reliance', it obstacle, and its goal. Dubois' theory of 'Cooperative Economic Effort' is also discussed in this chapter. King's theory of 'Thrift and Savings' is mentioned in this segment as well. Next, chapter two focuses on the researcher approach to economic empowerment. It points out that the researcher believes that African Americans can achieve economic empowerment by learning and appropriating Christian financial teachings in their lives. Further, this chapter discusses how blacks have always managed to survive economically despite racism and injustice. This portion indicates that black survival is attributed to black dependence on God. Finally, chapter two deals with debt in the Christian Church.

It discusses the two dominant financial movements in the church that seek to address the problem of consumer debt. At the close of this chapter the researcher shares how he plans to combine both secular and spiritual approaches to solve the problem of debt in the black church.

### **The State of the Art**

Economic Empowerment has always been apart of the African American agenda and a main ingredient in the black quest for freedom. Following slavery African American leaders not only fought for civic equality but for economic uplift as well. They understood that no real freedom could be realized unless economic empowerment was actualized. Because of this discernment blacks have struggled rigorously against institutionalized and legalized racism which prohibited economic uplift for blacks. At the turn of the Twentieth century many black leader developed theories of economic empowerment which they believed would combat racism while at the same time create economic uplift for blacks. One such figure was Booker T. Washington. Booker T. Washington believed that economic empowerment could be achieved by labor and vocation.

He strongly believed in economic self-reliance and the dignity of labor. He urged blacks to focus on the service sector. In his view labor was virtuous not a villain. In order to promote his theory of economic empowerment Washington sought to rehabilitate the popular perception of labor as thoughtless and servile activity. On November 18, 1896, during an address at Hampton Institute, Washington explained that he was attempting to make the Negro an intelligent, conscientious, skillful producer and have him appreciate the

dignity, beauty, and civilizing power that is in labor.<sup>1</sup> According to Robert Michael Franklin, Washington's objective was to dissociate the labor of free men and women and its virtues from that familiar forced, dehumanizing labor of the slave era. Washington believed that an economic base and self-determination were the keys to economic empowerment and secured freedom, as Franklin puts it: "For Washington, secure freedom rested upon controlling material assets, especially land, small businesses, and home. Achievements in the arts, politics, and other more refined, nonmaterial endeavors were praiseworthy only if they were buttressed by an economic power base and community self-determination."<sup>2</sup> In the end Washington's economic theory required that the black community establish itself on a relatively self-sufficient economic basis, produce for itself all that it needed to live, and produce certain consumer items of such high quality that whites and others would support the items in the marketplace.<sup>3</sup>

Another figure that pushed for economic empowerment was W.E.B Dubois. Unlike Washington Dubois promoted an economic theory of black professionalism and black labor. He believed that blacks could achieve economic uplift by cooperative efforts on the part of black laborers and black professionals. Though he embrace Washington's views concerning the need for voluntary self-segregation and self-reliance in the interest of developing collective black power, he rejected Washington's approach on the grounds that it did not foresee twentieth-century developments such as the concentration of industries,

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<sup>1</sup>Booker T. Washington, *Selected Speeches of Booker T. Washington*, ed. E. Davidson Washington (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1932), 42.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Michael Franklin, *Liberating Visions* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1990), 22.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

land monopoly, and the mechanization of the workplace.<sup>4</sup>“Dubois urged young blacks to create alliances with each other and prove their utility to the labor movement and to demonstrate their efficiency as workers, managers, and controllers of capital.<sup>5</sup>

According to Rampersad, Dubois called for a united college and vocational system, greater emphasis on engineering and industrial planning, and a dedication to the ideals of poverty, work, knowledge, and sacrifice.<sup>6</sup> While endorsing the proper role of each vocation in the African American community, he promoted his vision of black professional and black laborers cooperating in the service of economic and political liberation. As Franklin states: “Dubois saw a greater mobilization of the black community latent power emerging from the concerted deployment of political goods (voting, office holding), economic goods, and high scholastic performance (brainpower).”<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately Dubois’s faith in political goods and activism remained constant throughout his life, as He puts it: “There exist a chance for the Negroes to organize a cooperative within their own group. By letting Negro farmer feed Negro artisans, and Negro technicians guide Negro home industries, and Negro thinkers plan this integration of cooperation, while Negro artists dramatize and beautify the struggle, economic independence can be achieved.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>W. E. B. DuBois, *W. E. B. DuBois Speaks 1890-1919*, ed. Philip Foner, Vol. 2 (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 80.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Arnold Rampersad, *The Art and Imagination of W. E. B. DuBois* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), 164.

<sup>7</sup>Franklin, *Liberating Visions*, 59.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

Yet another champion of economic empowerment was Martin Luther King, Jr. Like other modern African American moralists King understood the relationship and interdependence of political and economic goods. He called for a radical economic reformation. Franklin contends that “King advocated radical economic reform at a societal level and at the level of individual economic behavior.”<sup>9</sup>

With respect to personal reformation, King strongly believed in and promoted the Protestant Work Ethic. He urged blacks to practice a wiser economy, and exercise thrift as they began to earn greater wealth. According to Franklin, King believed that people should regard their work as a calling from God and should execute their responsibilities with a sense of responsibility and personal pride.

Moreover, King viewed thrift and saving as the conditions for economic liberation of blacks. In response to a reader’s question concerning the Negro’s responsibility in economic affairs, King wrote in the March 1958 issue of *Ebony*: “There is great deal that the Negro can do to lift himself by his own bootstraps. Well has it been said by one that Negroes too often buy what they want and beg for what they need. Negroes must learn to practice systematic saving. They must also pool their economic resources through various cooperative enterprises. Such agencies as credit unions, saving and loan associations, and finance companies are needed in every Negro community.”<sup>10</sup>

Unlike Booker T. Washington, King’s advice regarding economic security of the black community was less progressive insofar as he did not strongly advocate the need for black to develop and gain control manufacturing and industrial corporation. For King was

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>10</sup>Martin Luther King, Jr., “Advice for Living”, *Ebony*, March, 1958, 12.

more concerned with solving the problem of employment, income disparity, and job discrimination. Rhetorically, he asked, "What will it profit [the Negro] to be able to send his children to an integrated school if the family income is insufficient to buy them School? What will he gain by being permitted to move to an integrated neighborhood if he cannot afford to do so because he is unemployed or has a low-paying job with no future."<sup>11</sup>

Finally, King sought to bring about economic empowerment for black by attacking the institutional Dimension of economic oppression. For King one of the ways America could help to restore the black community was to commit to reparations and full employment.

### **Economic Empowerment**

Unlike Washington and Dubois the writer believes that the easiest way to achieve economic empowerment is by reducing consumer debt within the black community. Drawing from Kings view of thrift and savings as conditions for economic liberation the writer believes that African Americans must practice wiser economy if economic empowerment is to be realized. This problem must be addressed according to the writer. If African-Americans don't address the problem of consumer debt, Blacks may curtail the possibility of economic empowerment, political leverage, racial justice, community development, educational advancement, viability and personal well-being for the whole race. However, if Blacks resolve the problem of consumer debt, then Blacks will achieve economic empowerment, overcome the economic marginality that plagues the race, restore vigor and vitality back to Black businesses, be able to rebuild Black communities,

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<sup>11</sup>Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why Can't We Wait* (New York: Signet Book's New American Library, 1963), 135.

and move the race from contingency to viability. How can Blacks fix the problem of consumer debt? The answer is simple: if blacks who find themselves in unacceptable levels of consumer debt appropriate biblical, theological and financial principles taught in financial clinics presented by the black church, then those blacks will take positive steps toward consumer debt reduction and consequently will bring about economic empowerment for Black America.

### **African American Spirituality**

*"The purpose of evil was to survive it."* Toni Morrison.<sup>12</sup> African-Americans have faced many challenges as a race. As a people, Blacks have had to endure the brutality of slavery, failed reconstruction, Jim Crow, and economic marginalization. However, despite social, political, and economic oppression, Blacks have weathered the storms of discrimination, disadvantage, denial and have come forth with body and soul together. Why are African-Americans able to endure? Why are African-Americans able to get through unimaginable adversity? It is because of African-American spirituality. Spirituality for Blacks means to be a surviving human who depends upon God. Surviving is a chief quality of Blacks. If there is anything African-Americans know how to do, it is to survive. Maya Angelou captures the essence of African-American spirituality when she states: "Some was hurt before you; wronged before you; hungry before you; humiliated before you; raped before you; yet someone survived."

The survival strategy in the everyday economic life of African-Americans means to just get by or 'survin one day at a time.' Surviving means to eke out a living by whatever

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Newman, *African-American Quotations* (New York: Benchmark Press, 2000), 134.

means possible. It means staying alive ‘until my change comes.’ Studies of extremely poor Black people have shown that many of them rely on an economy of economy of bartering, exchanging, and trading goods and possessions.<sup>13</sup> African-American spirituality exalts survival and berates suicide, it chooses being over on-being and enables Blacks to persevere through obstacles of adversity and subjugates the impulse to capitulate.

Another characteristic of African-American spirituality is dependence upon God. Because depending on God is an important part of Black spirituality, African-Americans have traditionally taken a subordinate posture when facing adversity. A popular scripture in the Black church is “trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not to thy own understanding, in all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy path”.<sup>14</sup> Dependence upon God permeates the Black prayer. Ralph Mark Gilbert illustrates this point in his prayer, “We Need Thy Hand.” He declares: “Heavenly Father, we know from all of the experiences that have been ours, that we cannot make the journey by ourselves. All of life teaches us that we need Thy hand; we must be led by Thy counsel. We would walk daily with Thee, because of Thy help; but we also would walk with Thee for the joy that we obtain from Thy fellowship. Withdraw not Thy presence from us, for we are lost without Thee, and find ourselves stumbling blindly in the surrounding darkness.”<sup>15</sup>

This prayer suggests that African-Americans depend strongly upon the Lord for companionship and guidance. Not only is dependence on God evident in the Black prayer, but also in Black gospel music. “I Will Trust in the Lord” and “I’m Trusting in Thee,

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<sup>13</sup>Carol Stack, *All My Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 42.

<sup>14</sup>Proverbs 3:5-6 (KJV) King James Version

<sup>15</sup>James Melvin Washington, *Conversation With God* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 170.

Lord” are gospel favorites in the Black church. Dependence for African-Americans means to trust in a God who is able to deliver and set free. A speech delivered by Henry Highland Garnet supports this claim. The resistance address, delivered in August 1843, at the National Negro Convention held in Buffalo, New York suggests that the resistance which Garnet pressed upon his audience was also laced with dependence upon God. He states: “Let your motto be resistance! Resistance! RESISTANCE! No oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance. What kind of resistance you had better make, you must decide by the circumstances that surround you, and according to the suggestion of expediency. Brethren, Adieu! Trusting in the living God. Labor for the peace of the human race, and remember that you are four million.”<sup>16</sup>

Garnet not only pressed upon his listeners to resist slavery, but also to trust in God. It is clear from this passage that Pre-Civil War Blacks depended on God and believed that God would ultimately liberate them from the bonds of slavery. African-American spirituality has in times past, and continues today to help Blacks survive oppression and to trust in the Lord.

### **The Christian Church and Consumer Credit**

Consumer debt is a problem for many Christians, just as it is a problem for most Americans. Many Christians are up to their necks in debt and find it hard to pay bills. Debt has caused many Christians to lose hope, self-respect, and self-worth. It has destroyed Christian friendships, families and marginalized many believers, so that they are unable to experience the ‘American Dream.’ Therefore, I am studying consumer debt in

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<sup>16</sup>Deidre Mullane, ed., *Crossing The Danger Water* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), 121.

the Christian church because I want to find out how the Christian church views consumer debt, its cause and cure, its basic assumptions, its point of agreement and disagreement, in order to know what approach will best serve the in mitigating consumer in the lives of African-Americans.

The current issue facing the Christian church is that of approach. What is the best way to mitigate consumer debt? What method should Christians use to reduce consumer debt? These are the questions that challenge most clerics and certified Christian financial planners.

There are two approaches to the problem. The first approach is the prosperity gospel way, which holds that through using God's system of finance, Christians can overcome consumer debt. The second approach is the financial management way. This view holds that by fashioning a lifestyle according to income, budgeting, and creating and carrying out a financial plan, Christians can mitigate debt in their lives. Though both approaches stem from the Christian church, they are not the same. Each approach represents a different sect within the Christian church. Each has its own theological assumption, interpretation of consumer debt, cause and cure for debt. For a better understanding of these differences, let's examine each approach and movement.

### **The Prosperity Gospel Movement**

The prosperity gospel movement views God as a transcendent deliverer, who descends from the heavens and blesses Christians with a supernatural prosperity that mitigates consumer debt. This movement believes that God wants Christians to be debt-free because consumer debt prohibits believers from experiencing a life of prosperity. Dr. Frederick K. C. Price, Pastor of Crenshaw Christian Center, supports this claim. He

declares: "What God has in mind is a financial, economic program to so bless you that all your needs and desires which are consistent with a godly life will be met. Then you will have such an abundance that you will be a reservoir of finance, a reservoir of material goods. You will be able to take those things and put them into the work of the ministry to promote the Gospel. But you cannot give away much if your own needs are not met. You cannot do it when you are struggling yourself just to pay your electric bill. So God has a plan that will enable you to be financially and materially independent of the circumstances."<sup>17</sup>

Dr. Creflo A. Dollar, Jr. also supports this claim in his book, *No More Debt* when he states: "Now is the time to apply faith pressure on the anointing of debt release! As Christians living in these last days, it is vital that we get out and stay out of debt. Why? So we can fulfill the mandate given to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, to be blessed and to be a blessing until all families of the earth are blessed. But you can't do that when you're living from paycheck to paycheck struggling to make ends meet."<sup>18</sup>

How does the prosperity gospel movement view debt? Consumer debt is viewed by the prosperity movement as a demonic spirit designed to keep persons from experiencing the abundant life Jesus promised in John 10:10, according to Dollar. Dollar declares: "Debt comes from the strong man, Satan, who desires for you to remain in bondage. He must be bound up so that you can walk in your God-given inheritance of prosperity . . ."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Frederick K. C. Price, *High Finance* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Harrison House, 1984), 30.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 74-75.

Dr. Leroy Thompson, Sr., in his book *Money Cometh*, buttress this idea when he says "... put away those credit cards, I sometimes call demons..."<sup>20</sup> Beyond the view that debt is the devil or some demonic spirit, lay the belief that the world system of finance is the fundamental cause of debt for most Christians. This movement holds that whenever Christians use worldly methods, techniques, and strategies in their financial affairs, Christians go against the word and will of God. As a result, Christians end up in debt. Paraphrasing Kenneth Copeland, many Christians are in debt because they appropriate in their lives a demonic world system, which is 99.9 percent of the time incorrect that rocks back and forth between the two extremes of depression and inflation.<sup>21</sup>

Dollar supports this belief. He holds that Christians are in debt because they have chosen the world system of finance over God's system of finance. He states: "Where you are now in your finances is the result of the choices you have made. Brother Dollar are you telling me that I'm in debt because I chose to be? Well yes! Whether you realize it or not, there are two systems at work in the financial realm: God's system and the world's system - you have chosen to operate in the one that perpetuates debt."<sup>22</sup>

The prosperity gospel movement opposes the world's system approach for several reasons. For them, the worldly approach is not designed to get Christians ahead and out of debt. Price states: "The world's economic system is not designed to get Christians ahead, rather it is designed to keep their noses to the grindstone . . . it is all a systematic plan of Satan to keep men's noses to the grindstone!"<sup>23</sup> Next, this movement opposes the

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<sup>20</sup>Leroy Thompson, *Money Cometh* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Harrison House, 1999), 64.

<sup>21</sup>Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Harrison House, 2000), 18-19.

<sup>22</sup>Creflo Dollar, *No More Debt* (College Park, Georgia: Creflo Dollar Ministries, 2000), 22.

<sup>23</sup>Price, *High Finance*, 9.

world's system approach because it fosters dependency. Dollar upholds the view, he says: "Most of us have already tried to get out of debt through the world's system of bill consolidation, second mortgages, credit counseling, or bankruptcy. However, none of these methods permanently resolve the problem because they foster dependency."<sup>24</sup>

Last, this movement opposes the world's system approach because it believes that the prosperity (i.e., financial wealth) this approach brings about is cursed, possessed and tainted by the devil, unfit for Christian use.<sup>25</sup>

Typically, this phrase refers to using spiritual principles as the means to consumer debt reduction. This movement asserts that if Christians appropriate certain spiritual principles in their lives, Then God will bless Christians with a supernatural prosperity that mitigates consumer debt. This movement believes that by daily scripture reading, confessional chants, the binding of demons, and giving, Christians can move God, who in turn blesses them with an abundant wealth that mitigates debt.

### **The Financial Management**

In contrast the financial management movement does not view God as some transcendent deliverer, who descends from the heavens and blesses Christians with a supernatural prosperity that mitigates consumer debt. For instance, Larry Burkett views God as a support who helps indebted Christians overcome by consumer debt. For him, God functions as an advocate or assistant in the lives of indebted Christians, he states: "I

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>25</sup>Thompson, *Money Cometh*, 280.

believe that the decision to help individuals with their finances is the Lord's, I do believe God wants to support strongly those who love and trust him . . .”<sup>26</sup>

A different view is presented by Scot Kays who views God as a God who wants Christians to pay off consumer debt. Kays contends that God disapproves of Christians withholding from others what they are due. Kays gives the following example: “If I tell you that I will pay you \$100 for typing several letters for me, once you have typed those letters, I owe you \$100. That is a debt I owe, and God says I must pay it. If I do not pay this debt, I have sinned.”<sup>27</sup>

What is debt? According to this movement, consumer debt is bondage. In other words, debt is a condition that enslaves Christians. Paraphrasing Bishop T. D. Jakes, debt is essentially economic slavery. Jakes affirms: “When you owe another, your freedom is impaired. Your ability to decide your destiny is tainted by the amount you owe.”<sup>28</sup> Kays supports this claim when he states: “When somebody borrows money from another person or an institution, they have, in some form or fashion, made themselves subservient to the lender.”<sup>29</sup> Kays believes that debt is an obligation that impedes one's ability to obey God and to make choices with one's money.

What causes debt? Unlike that prosperity gospel movement, which believes that debt is caused by failure to use God's system of finance, the financial management movement holds that there are many reasons Christians end up in debt.<sup>30</sup> Larry Burkett

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<sup>26</sup>Dollar, *No More Debt*, 138-139.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>28</sup>T. D. Jakes, *The Great Investment* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2000), 50.

<sup>29</sup>Scott Kays, *Achieving Your Financial Potential* (New York: Double Day, 1999).

<sup>30</sup>Larry Burkett, *Debt-Free Living*, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press), 47-49.

holds that ignorance, over indulgence, and poor financial planning leads Christians into debt. Moreover, Burkett argues many Christians end up in debt because they try to buy a home too soon or pay too much and as a result, debt ensues. He contends many Christian couples commit more than 60 percent of their budget to housing and this, he says put them in economic jeopardy.

Furthermore, Larry Burkett suggests that the second most common source of debt is the purchase of a new car. He holds that often Christians who cannot qualify for a home will spring for a new car as a compromise. For Burkett, it is not a good compromise because cars now sell for prices that houses sold for twenty years ago. Burkett argues that consequently, Christians overspend when they purchase a new car. Finally, Larry Burkett argues that failure to plan financially for disaster often cause Christians to become indebted. Burkett suggests that most Christians never anticipate those expenses and budget for them, he declares: "Failure to plan this way is a major reason many people end up in debt. When the expenses occur, they must be paid, so the only alternative available is often a credit card."<sup>31</sup>

What is the solution? This movement unanimously agrees that if Christians fashion a lifestyle according to their income, create a budget, develop and carry out a financial plan, then Christians will experience consumer debt reduction. Bishop T.D. Jakes upholds this claim. Discussing debt and how Christians should behave, Jakes had this to say: "You should not run up credit-debt for things that are neither necessary for your daily living nor within your financial means to afford. Your lifestyle needs to be determined by your

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 138.144.

present income not what you wish it would be.”<sup>32</sup> Jakes goes on to suggest that the best way to control overspending that leads to debt is by creating a budget. He states: “The only way you can take control of your spending and determine your lifestyle priorities is with a budget.”<sup>33</sup>

For the financial management movement, not only are budgeting and living within ones means, viewed as means to consumer debt reduction, but financial planning is seen as a means to mitigating consumer debt. According to this movement, debt-free living is the result of diligently executing a carefully constructed financial plan. Kays offers a financial plan that will mitigate debt in lives of Christians. Kays calls this plan the debt liquidation system. His financial plan is as follows:

First, begin by setting aside an amount of over and above your required monthly payments that will be dedicated to accelerating the liquidation of debt. Apply this entire sum to the smallest debt, in addition to that debt’s regular payment. Since you are attacking the smallest debt first, hopefully it will be completely paid in a short period of time. Once the first debt is paid off, take its monthly payment, plus the extra amount you have set aside for accelerating the liquidation of your debts and apply this entire amount each month to your next smallest debt, in addition to that debt’s regular payment. Keep that obligation’s payment dedicated to eliminating debt, applying it to the next largest debt each time.<sup>34</sup>

The two groups’ differences are summed up in the following. First, the prosperity gospel movement interprets God as a deity who descends from the heavens and rescues Christians from debt, by blessing Christians with a supernatural prosperity that mitigates consumer debt. While on the other hand, the financial management movement interprets God as a supporter, who desires that Christians pay their debt. Second, the prosperity

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>34</sup>Kays, *Achieving Your Financial Potential*, 76.

sect interprets debt as a demonic spirit. On the contrary, the management movement interprets debt as failure to pay another what is due. The writer disagrees with the prosperity movement interpretation of debt. For the writer debt is not a devil or a demon, at least biblically speaking, rather debt is an unsatisfied financial obligation according to scripture.

The researcher disagrees with the prosperity movement, because its interpretation of debt is based on a faulty theology, a theology that holds that all reality, both negative and positive have a spiritual origin. Therefore, since debt is negative, then it must come from the devil. Third, the prosperity gospel movement believes that by using worldly techniques in financial affairs, Christians bring about debt in their lives. On the other hand, the financial management movement believes that the hasty purchase of big ticket items (e.g., homes, cars) and the failure to plan for disaster are the causes of debt in the lives of Christians. The writer rejects the belief that secular techniques cause Christians to become indebted. In fact, the writer believes the use of secular techniques and methods are signs of good stewardship.

Fourth, the prosperity movement holds that God's system of finance is the solution to consumer debt. This movement believes that if Christians appropriate certain spiritual principles in their lives, then God will bless Christians with a supernatural blessing that mitigates consumer debt. On the contrary, the financial management movement suggests that by fashioning a lifestyle according to ones means, creating a budget, developing and carrying out a financial plan, Christians can mitigate debt in their lives.

In closing, the researcher endorses the financial management approach because it promotes good stewardship and the rational aspects of economic planning. However, the writer reluctantly endorses the prosperity gospel approach on the grounds it presumes that

through the magical power of religion and faith, it can create wealth for its adherents.

While there are certain intangibles that are absolutely essential for economic success, (such as determination, a focused mind, daring, and courage) a rational plan is necessary as well.<sup>35</sup>

To some degree the prosperity gospel movement eschews the rational aspects of economic planning. Aside from this negative the prosperity movement does provide for adherents a basic model for reducing debt, as a result the writer intended to combine both secular and spiritual approaches in order to assist African Americans in consumer debt reduction.

Chapter two has discussed Washington's theory of 'Economic Self Reliance', its obstacle, and its goal. Dubois' theory of 'Cooperative Economic Effort' was also discussed in this chapter. King's theory of 'Thrift and Savings' was mentioned in this segment as well. Next, chapter two focused on the researcher's approach to economic empowerment. It pointed out how economic empowerment could be achieved by teaching blacks ways to reduce consumer debt. Further, this chapter discussed how blacks have always managed to survive economically despite racism, and injustice. This portion of the chapter indicated that black survival has been connected to black dependence on God. Finally, chapter two dealt with debt in the church. It discussed the two dominant Christian Movements that seek to address the problem of consumer debt. At the close of the chapter the researcher indicated how he planned to combine the two approaches to debt reduction into one approach.

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<sup>35</sup>Samuel Roberts, *African-American Christian Ethics* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 181.

Chapter three establishes the theoretical foundation for the model. Biblical, theological, and historical foundations are discussed at length in this chapter. The biblical section addresses the question why is debt biblically problematic. God as sustainer, Christ as liberator, and the Church as servant are explored in the third chapter. Finally a genealogy of consumer credit is discussed along with a discussion on the economic marginalization and economic conquest of African Americans.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **CONSUMER DEBT IN BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

This chapter is very crucial to the research model because it lays the foundation for the research project. It also defines debt from a biblical perspective and provides biblical warrants for the research model. In addition, it explains the theological view points that ground the financial clinic used in model. It leads a discussion on God as Sustainer of Human Flourishing, Christ as Liberator, Church as Servant Of God, and the Black Church as Liberating Diakonia. Furthermore, chapter three gives attention to the evolution of consumer credit. Chapter three tracks consumer credit from antiquity to the present, thus demonstrating the transformation of church opinion on the matter of consumer credit and debt. This chapter concentrates on five periods of history, namely antiquity, medieval, reformation, enlightenment, and modernity. It shares pivotal personalities in each period that paved the way for consumer credit in contemporary society. Last, this chapter illustrates how consumer debt is a result of economic marginalization due to racism. It sites instances when blacks were excluded from the economic arena. It discusses how consumer debt is the new form of economic marginalization and the measure African Americans have taken to counter the problem.

### Biblical Foundation

What is debt? Debt in the Bible comes from the Hebrew word *neshiy* which means an unsatisfied financial obligation.<sup>1</sup> When a person in biblical times failed to satisfy his or her financial obligation, such a person went into debt. An example of this is portrayed in the case of the widow and her two sons (II Kings 4:1-7). Because the widow was unable to pay off her loan, she ended up in debt. In scripture, debt often involved pledges and usury and these were burdensome. The verb *habal*, “to take in pledge” (Deuteronomy 24:6, 17; Job 24:3, 9) denotes something binding and painful as well. Interest or usury derives from the word *neshek*, meaning “something bitten off.”<sup>2</sup> Treatment of debt during biblical times was very burdensome, oppressive, and severe.

What were the sources of debt in the Bible? First, debt stemmed from borrowing. If a person borrowed something from his neighbor and was unable to repay, then he would become indebted to the lender. Nehemiah 5:4 describes how the poor inhabitants borrowed money for the king’s tribute and as a result ended up indebted to the greedy nobles. Second, indebtedness stemmed from usury or high interest rates. The practice of mortgaging land at exorbitant interest grew among Jews during the Captivity. The prophet Nehemiah denounced this practice because it brought about extreme debt and exacerbated the condition of debt. He declares “Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them. And I said unto them, we after our

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<sup>1</sup>Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Old Testament* (Iowa Falls, Iowa: World, 1994), 81.

<sup>2</sup>*Wycliffe Bible Dictionary* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 444.

ability have redeemed our brethren, the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? Or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer. Also I said, it is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies? I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn; I pray you, let us leave off this usury.<sup>3</sup>

Third, high interest rate loans caused persons to become indebted, as was the case of the widow mother of two.<sup>4</sup> The root meaning of the word debt in this text denotes a high interest rate loan.<sup>5</sup> This widow was unable to pay off the high interest loan she obtained. The interest was too much for her to pay and consequently she became indebted to the creditors.

Fourth, debt stemmed from surety. A surety was a person who took responsibility for another's debts. When a person became surety and took responsibility for someone else's debt, such a person would be responsible for repayment. If the surety was unable to repay the debt, then the surety would become indebted. The scripture warns against hastily becoming a surety by striking hands. "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure."<sup>6</sup> "A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becomes surety in the presence of his friend."<sup>7</sup> "Be not thou one of them that strike

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<sup>3</sup>Nehemiah 5:7-10 (KJV) King James Version

<sup>4</sup>II Kings 4:1-7

<sup>5</sup>Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study Old Testament, 81.

<sup>6</sup>Proverbs 11:15

<sup>7</sup>Proverbs 7:8

hands, of them that are sureties for debts.”<sup>8</sup> The Bible speaks strongly against surety because it often leads to indebtedness.

What were the consequences for failure to satisfy debt? The result of failure to repay debts was very stringent. One might be forced to sell his children into slavery, the children might be seized for unpaid debt, the debtor and his wife might be forced by the debts to become slaves or one might voluntarily chose to become a slave to another.<sup>9</sup>

In the New Testament, failure to satisfy debts resulted in the seizure and selling of personal assets. An example of this is found in Matthew 18:24-25. The lord of the servant commanded that the servant’s assets be seized and sold for payment of debts. Matthew writes: “And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not [paid] his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.”<sup>10</sup> Not only could one’s assets be seized and sold for failure to repay debt, but also failure to pay debt resulted in the imprisonment of the debtor “And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.”<sup>11</sup> How could a debtor be released from debt? Beyond repayment the Mosaic Law ordained that the creditor release his brother Israelite from all obligations at the year of release, which recurred every seven years.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Proverbs 22:26-27

<sup>9</sup>II King 4:1; Neh. 5:5, 8; Ex. 21:2-11; Lev. 25:39-43; Deut. 15:12-18; *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, 1045.

<sup>10</sup>Matthew 18:25

<sup>11</sup>Matthew 18:30

<sup>12</sup>Deut 15:1-3, John D. Davis, *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1929), 172.

Also, debtors were released from debts during the Year of Jubilee, which came once every 50 years.<sup>13</sup> During the Year of Jubilee, not only were debts to be canceled and slaves freed, but land, whether farm or unwalled village property which had become alienated because of debts and had not been redeemed, was to be returned to its former owner. Leviticus 25:28 states: “But if he be not able to restore it to him, then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it until the Year of Jubilee: and in the Jubilee it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession.”<sup>14</sup>

What is the Bible’s position on debt? The Bible’s position on debt is simple: owe no man anything! This notion is based on words uttered by the Apostle Paul. Paul spoke these words to a congregation that struggled with the idea of debt payment. Should Christians pay their debts, was the question that challenged the early Christian community in Rome. To resolve the tension in the Roman Church surrounding this issue, Paul instructed the community of believers to pay debts and owe no one anything.<sup>15</sup> Is Paul against debt? Is he against home mortgages, car payments, student loans, credit cards?

Some seem to believe this. J. Hudson Taylor, the godly missionary to China would never incur a debt, basing his conviction on this verse. Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, had the same conviction.<sup>16</sup> On the contrary, Paul is not against debt. He is against Christians accumulating debt they cannot hope to repay. Paul abhorred careless and deceitful debt. For he believed that careless and deceitful debt was not acceptable

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<sup>13</sup>Leviticus 25

<sup>14</sup>Leviticus 25:28

<sup>15</sup>Romans 13:8

<sup>16</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right* (Colorado Springs: Colorado: Charlot Victor Publishing), 147.

behavior among Christians and that the responsibilities of Christians are to make payments and not borrow beyond their ability to pay.<sup>17</sup>

Today many Christians are in financial debt. Many Christians live an existence marked by enormous amounts of debt. According to Dr. Creflo A. Dollar, Jr., “over 90% of the body of Christ is in debt, without a clue as to how to get out and stay out of financial bondage.”<sup>18</sup> Although many Christians believe and profess that God is a great provider, on the contrary, their lives reflect a lack of viability. In other words, at the present, many Christians experience an inability to sustain themselves depending upon no other except God. The reason most Christians’ lives contradicts their belief and profession is because many fail to realize that the God of Holy Scripture is a God who disapproves of indebtedness. My conviction is simply that God wants humans to be debt-free. For instance, God through the Mosaic Law, ordained that the creditor release his brother Israelite from all obligations at the year of release - which occurred every seven years. Deuteronomy 15:1-2 states: “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debts. And this is the manner of remission: every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother, because the Lord’s remission has been proclaimed.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Bruce B. Berton, R. V. David and Neil Wilson, *Life Application Bible Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), 253.

<sup>18</sup>Dollar, *No More Debt*, 13.

<sup>19</sup>Deuteronomy 15:1-2

Thus, under Mosaic Law, the only debts that could exceed seven years were those made to non-Jews or from non-Jews.<sup>20</sup> This passage strengthens my position that God's nature is to help those in debt recover from indebtedness.

Throughout the Bible, God acts as the debtor's advocate. An example of this is found in II Kings 4:1-7. In the passage regarding one of the wives of the sons of the prophets who came unto Elisha. The story goes on to say that this desperate and frantic widow explained to Elisha her financial crisis. Her family was indebted and the creditor was coming to enslave her two sons due to unpaid debts. Elisha instructed the helpless widow to go borrow some vessels from neighbors. Obeying his instruction, she borrowed some vessels, after which she went home and began to pour oil into the vessels her sons brought to her. To her surprise, the more she poured, the more the oil flowed. She poured into the vessels until all of the vessels were filled.

God performed a miracle for the widow. As Dr. Miles Jones, Professor of Homiletics at Virginia Union University School Theology, explained "God anointed the oil to such a degree that the oil had staying power and did not run out."<sup>21</sup> Through divine intervention the widow woman and her two sons were delivered from indebtedness. Indeed God intends for human beings to experience full-freedom living. God wants humans to live an existence wherein they have the ability to sustain themselves depending on no other except God.

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<sup>20</sup>Burkett, *Debt-Free Living*, 58.

<sup>21</sup>Miles Jones, Homelitic Professor at Virginia Union University, School of Theology, Richmond, Virginia, Personal Interview, 2002.

Deuteronomy 28:12 buttresses this thought: “The Lord shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto they hand in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nation, and shalt not borrow.”<sup>22</sup>

The promise the Lord gave unto the children of Israel was simple. If they would obey the commandment of the Lord, then the Lord would bless them to such a degree that they would have no need to borrow. Mathew Henry interprets the latter part of verse twelve as “but thou shalt not have occasion to borrow.”<sup>23</sup> This verse, however, is not an indictment against borrowing, the Bible does not condemn borrowing. Rather, it condemns persons who fail to repay their debts, since failure to repay one’s debt signifies wickedness. Psalm 37:21 says, “The wicked borroweth, and payth not again; but the righteous showeth mercy, and giveth.”<sup>24</sup>

Deuteronomy 28:12 emphatically suggests the sufficiency of Divine Favor. It implies that God blesses His children to such a degree that they do not borrow, beg, or depend on any being except God. Why is debt biblically problematic? Simply stated debt is bad stewardship. Dr. Samuel Roberts, the Ethics Professor at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia contends, “indebtedness indicates among other things a lack of good stewardship.”<sup>25</sup>

The Bible indicates that in the beginning the Lord God created the world. From this world, God fashioned and formed humanity. In the beginning, humanity was liable to

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<sup>22</sup>Deuteronomy 28:12

<sup>23</sup>Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Regency Reference Literary, 1961), 197.

<sup>24</sup>Psalm 37:21

<sup>25</sup>Samuel Roberts, Ethic Professor, Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, Personal Interview, 2002..

no one. Instead, humans possessed dominion over all things and all living creatures. Genesis 1:28-30 suggests that God gave humans dominion over the earth, and with that dominion, the responsibility to manage and govern all things. From this scripture, one sees that God intended for humanity to be good stewards.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat; and it was so. (Genesis 1:28-30)

The words “I am putting you in charge . . .” are exceedingly important. These words convey God’s concern for His creation, a concern that God shows by placing human beings in charge of all that He created. To be “in charge” means to take care of one’s charges in a manner similar to the foreman on a ranch. The foreman does not own the ranch. He or she is in charge of the operations and is responsible to the ranch owner. The foreman is a steward. In biblical times, a steward was a person put in charge of someone else’s property.<sup>26</sup>

The second creation myth also conveys the idea of stewardship. According to Van Benschoten, Jr., a ‘Garden of Eden’ is developed as a part of the whole universe made by God.<sup>27</sup> Genesis 2:15 states, “Then the Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it.”<sup>28</sup> In the creation of myth of Genesis, chapter two, Adam and

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<sup>26</sup>A. Q. Van Benschoten, Jr., *What the Bible Says About Stewardship* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1983), 17.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Genesis 2:15

Eve are depicted as good stewards, for nowhere in the second myth is there any mention of irresponsible management on their part. However, when the two ate of the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve went from being good stewards to being bad stewards.

The ancient story of Genesis 3:16-17 portrays Yahweh as a deity who holds humans accountable for ad stewardship. According to the saga, the male and female were subject to Divine judgement. Unto the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, because thou has hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee saying, thou shalt not eat of it, cursed is the ground for thy sake, in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life".<sup>29</sup>

From the creation myths of Genesis, one learns that stewardship is what God requires of humanity. A similar expression of stewardship is found in Psalms 8:5-8 which states "For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the fields; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas."<sup>30</sup>

According to John Philips, in David's day, man's dominion was displayed in his power over animals, power to domesticate and tame them and turn them to his use.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Genesis 3:16-17

<sup>30</sup>Psalms 8:5-8

<sup>31</sup>John Philips, *Exploring the Psalms: Volume One Psalms 1-88* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1988), 68.

What is vivid and clear about this Psalm is that God placed humankind in charge of His creation and that expects humankind to keep everything under control through stewardship. Based on these biblical examples, one may conclude that God wants humans to be good stewards because bad stewardship brings about indebtedness.

In addition, indebtedness is theologically problematic because it brings about enslavement of God's people. Proverbs 22:7 states, "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender's slave."<sup>32</sup> In ancient times, one of the primary causes of servitude was debt. Many Hebrews found themselves enslaved because of their inability to pay off debts. If one owed a debt and could not pay it, then one was required to work for the lender until the debt was satisfied or for six years of release, after which one received manumission. As a debt-slave, one was not to be treated harshly, nor sent away empty handed upon one's release after the sixth year. Unfortunately, this ethical code was often violated inasmuch as no provision existed to protect debt-slaves from property liquidation or the selling of family members, contends John D. Davis.<sup>33</sup> The example of debt-slavery found in II Kings 4:11 illustrates how prevalent debt-slavery was in the ancient world.

The widow of the text came beseeching Elisha's help because she had not the means to pay her debt. She strongly believed that her failure to pay would result in the enslavement of her two sons. The passage reads "Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, thy servant, my husband, is dead;

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<sup>32</sup>Proverbs 22:7

<sup>33</sup>John D. Davis, *A Dictionary of the Bible: Fourth Edition* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1929), 729.

and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord; and the creditor is come to take unto him my tow sons to be bondsmen.”<sup>34</sup>

Another instance wherein debt-slavery is evident is found in Nehemiah 5:5. Hard times had fallen upon the residents of Judah during Nehemiah’s rebuilding campaign. There was a dearth of corn, probably for want of rain. Because markets were high and provisions were scarce and dear, the people cried out against their brethren, the Jews. The families who came out of Babylon were poor. According to Mathew Henry, they had been at great expense in building their homes, and had not yet gotten up their strength when unbearable burdens were placed upon them.<sup>35</sup> Due to poverty, inhabitants borrowed money from the nobles and rulers. Those who lent the money took advantage of the poor people’s desperation. They exacted interest from them at 12 percent (the hundredth part every month), forced the poor to mortgage to them their lands and houses (for the securing of the money) and took the profits of them for interest, and took their children for bond-servants to be enslaved or sold at pleasure. This was exemplified through the poor man’s lament, “our heirs must be their slaves, and it is not in our power to redeem.”<sup>36</sup>

It is not God’s will that humans be enslaved. On the contrary, God’s will for humans is that they have the freedom to determine their destiny. When the children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt, God delivered them from slavery. Exodus 3:7-8 tells us “And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters. For I know their sorrows; And I am come

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<sup>34</sup>II Kings 4:11

<sup>35</sup>Davis, *A Dictionary of the Bible: Fourth Edition*, 495-496.

<sup>36</sup>Nehemiah 5:1-12

down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians . . .”<sup>37</sup> If we truly accept that God intends for human beings to be free, then we must acknowledge that debt must be problematic for God.

Here I must point out at least five more reasons that debt is theologically problematic. In Nehemiah 5:1-12, another reason, aside from slavery, has to do with dependency. God disapproves of debt because it causes human beings to depend on others besides God. Those in Nehemiah’s community were not only slaves but also dependents. The poor inhabitants lost their ability to sustain themselves apart from the nobles and rulers. In other words, the slaves who borrowed money became dependent on the nobles and rulers to sustain their lifestyles and homes. “There were also those that said, we have borrowed money for the king’s tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards.”<sup>38</sup>

God never intended for human beings to depend on another. God’s intent was for human beings to be self-sustaining. Genesis 1:28-29 suggests that God blessed humanity with everything it needed to sustain itself. It states “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Exodus 3:7-8

<sup>38</sup>Nehemiah 5:4

<sup>39</sup>Genesis 1:28-29

The story of Cain and Abel supports the idea that God intended for humanity to be self-sustaining. Cain and Abel were self-sustaining humans to the extent that Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain was a tiller of the ground. Cain and Abel, prior to Cain's offense, worked and sustained their families with the cattle of the plains and the fruits of the ground. This early clan of humans was sustained by its ability to work the farms and raise the cattle. Cain and Abel depended upon no one except God and divine favor for support. Because of hard work and divine favor, the two were able to live free of liabilities - that is, they were able to be independent rather than dependent creatures.

Another classic example that suggests that God's intent for humans is that they be self-sustaining creatures is found in Proverbs 31:10-1. It states "Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ship; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens."<sup>40</sup>

The virtuous woman is described by the author as one who works for a living. She is not pictured as an idle housewife. Conversely, she sustains herself and her household by seeking wool and flax, working with her hands, bringing food from afar, and giving meat to her household and a portion to her maidens. From these biblical examples, one may concretely argue that debt is theologically problematic because it prohibits humans from achieving viability. Therefore, it thwarts God's intent that human beings sustain themselves.

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<sup>40</sup>Proverbs 31:1-10

Moreover, indebtedness is problematic because it is oppressive. Because of high levels of debt, the inhabitants of Nehemiah's community found themselves oppressed by the ruling class. According to Scott Kays, "ever since the beginning of time, rich people have, with few exceptions, ruled over poor people."<sup>41</sup> It should be added that not only have the rich ruled over the poor, but they also have oppressed and impoverished the poor. Through usury, the mortgaging of property, and enslavement, the ruling class oppressed the poor of Nehemiah's community.

Nevertheless, it is not God's will that the poor be oppressed. In the book of Deuteronomy it says, "Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land . . ."<sup>42</sup> God intends for humans to be free of debt because debt is oppressive.

Furthermore, God disapproves of debt because indebtedness begets more debt for humans it is problematic. The biblical record supports this argument. Indebtedness forced the poor to borrow money from the ruling class and consequently the poor went deeper and deeper into debt. The more debts they acquired, the more indebted they became. God indebtedness creates more financial problems. Nehemiah reveals the reason debt begets more debt. He says "Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Kays, *Achieving Your Financial Potential*, 72.

<sup>42</sup>Deuteronomy 24:14

<sup>43</sup>Nehemiah 5:5

The subtle suggestion within the scripture is that indebtedness renders one powerless to reduce created debt. The contention of the poor inhabitants was simple: “We neither have the power to redeem them . . .”<sup>44</sup> It is important to note that not only did the indebted lack the power to redeem their children from debt-slavery, but also they lacked the power to redeem themselves from indebtedness. High levels of debts rendered them powerless to meet their financial obligations and curtailed the possibility of liberation for themselves and their children.

Finally, debt is a theological problem because it threatens the possibility of viability for the succeeding generation. The children of the indebted found their capacity to acquire viability threatened, for they had to work as slaves in order to pay off their parents’ debts. It is not God’s intent that any child’s viable capacity be threatened or restricted by indebtedness. Since debt brings about the conditions that threaten the possibility of viability for a succeeding generation, God opposes it.

### **Theological Foundation**

#### **Theology of Sin**

From the beginning of time humanity has struggled with the reality of sin. Sin has robbed humanity of its divine nature and possibility. It has brought about division between the Creator and creature. According to James W.M. McLendon, Jr. Sin alienates from God, divides the sinner from God’s community, disorders the life of the sinner, and in that measure disorders creation. What is sin? There are at least three traditional ways in which sin can be interpreted.

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

Some contend sin is self-centeredness. It is when one takes one's place in the center of one's own world and stands as the standard of reference as between good and bad. This type of sin rejects God as sovereign. Simply put it is the sin of the titanic and egocentric self.

Next there is the sin of "Breaking Communion". This view holds that man was created to be in perfect fellowship with God and neighbor, but through willful disobedience man broke communion with God and neighbor and is cursed with alienation and estrangement from God and neighbor. This type of sin uses people and the world of nature merely to serve its own ends and will go to any lengths to get rid of the obnoxious presence of those considered inferior.

Last, sin is viewed as pride. It is this view that grounds the writer's research. In this view humanity is sovereign of itself. It rules itself and governs itself apart from God. Pride is different from humility. Pride is egotistical, but humility is meek. Pride is self-serving, but humility God serving. Pride is disobedient, but humility is obedient. According to some, "we are God creatures and completely dependent on God. The only reason for our existence and the only purpose in our lives is to live in trust and obedience to God. But we do not like being dependent and subservient; we want to run our own lives. Therefore, in our pride we rebel against God's sovereignty and proudly pretend to be like God with responsibility to no one but ourselves."<sup>45</sup> What are the negative attributes of pride? Pride leads to ignoring God and a life of disobedience. It can destroy relationships faster than almost anything taking away from others. Pride strengthens

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<sup>45</sup>Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 153-154.

man's own position at the expense of others finds comfort in false security. "Pride goes before destruction and haughtiness before a fall."<sup>46</sup>

The sin of pride is not an overestimation of man's talent (egotism), a flutter of delight that goes with accomplishment (vanity) nor an inner firmness of identity that is essential to integrity (self-respect). It means, rather, man's self exaltation into the position of God. Pride is nothing less than the human imagination fully seized by the Tempter's beautiful promise "You will be like God."<sup>47</sup> It is pride that causes humankind to move contrary to God's will. It is the voice that tells humanity it doesn't need God to sustain it.

The God of scripture sustains human flourishing. In other words, God upholds human thriving, blossoming, well being, and prosperity. Human flourishing is based on divine support. In Genesis 1:1-29 God created a world that would uphold and support human flourishing. According to James M. Gustafson, God created the necessary conditions for humans to flourish. He argues that human flourishing relies upon processes and relationships that are not of human creation. In Gustafson's view, humans are sustained by natural, social, cultural, and historical processes to which humans give tacit consent.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, Paul Tillich argues God as sustainer. In talking about God's sustaining creativity and freedom Tillich states: "Only in the power of being-itself is the creature able to resist nonbeing."<sup>49</sup> Tillich contends that God is essentially creative and therefore he is

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<sup>46</sup>Proverb 16:18

<sup>47</sup>William F. May, *A Catalog of Sins* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), 173.

<sup>48</sup>James Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 239.

<sup>49</sup>Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 261.

creative in every moment of temporal existence, giving the power of being to everything that has being out of the creative ground of the divine life.<sup>50</sup>

All humans are radically dependent on God. Radical dependence is much more than a sense of partial dependence on God. On the contrary, it acknowledges that humans are finite, contingent and radically dependent beings. As Daniel L. Migliore puts it “the realization of radical contingency is what philosophers and theologians have called the shock of nonbeing.”<sup>51</sup> As dependent beings humans are not necessary. They are creatures who exist at the pleasure of God. As contingent creatures mankind’s existence is precarious. Just as the sun gives life to all that lives, so God is the life in all that lives.

Akin to the view of God as sustainer is the doctrine of divine preservation. Preservation may be defined as the continuous work of God by which He maintains the things which He created, together with the properties and powers with which He endowed them. According to Berkhof, “the doctrine of preservation proceeds on the assumption that all created substances, whether they be spiritual or material, possess real and permanent existence, distinct from the existence of God, and have only such active and passive properties as they have derived from God.”<sup>52</sup>

It should be mentioned that the doctrine of preservation of the world is the door through which deistic concepts easily creep into the theological system. The deistic view holds that the world is an independent structure that moves according to its own laws. God certainly created the world “in the beginning” and gave it the laws of nature. But

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmann Publishing Company, 1991), 86.

<sup>52</sup>L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmann Publishing Company, 1941), 170.

after is beginning he either does not interfere at all (consistent deism) or only occasionally through miracle and revelation (theistic deism) or he acts in a continual interrelationship (consistent theism). In these three cases, it would not be proper to speak of sustaining creation.<sup>53</sup>

Deistic preservation is unreasonable, irreligious, and an un-Biblical representation. It is unreasonable, because it implies that God communicated self-subsistence to the creature, while self-subsistence and self-sustentation are incommunicable properties, which characterize only the Creator. The creature can never be self-sustaining, but must be upheld from day to day by the almighty power of the Creator. It is also unbiblical, since it puts God altogether outside of His creation, while the Bible teaches in many passages that He is not only transcendent, but also immanent in the works of His hands. God as sustainer stands in opposition to deistic preservation and echoes the words of the Apostle Paul who said “it is in God that we live, move, and have our being.”<sup>54</sup>

Finally, God as sustainer provides for human flourishing. That is to say, God provides humans with what humans need in order to flourish. The wilderness experience of Exodus buttress’ this claim. When the children of Israel were out in the wilderness hungry and famished, God sustained their existence by providing manna and quail from heaven: “Then the Lord said to Moses, I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day”<sup>55</sup> In Psalm 23, the Eternal is portrayed as a shepherd who provides for his sheep. When David wrote this Psalm, he was celebrating the fact that when one has the Lord one has all that one need.

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<sup>53</sup>Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 262.

<sup>54</sup>Acts 17:28

<sup>55</sup>Exodus 16:4

Joseph M. Stowell, in his book *Strength For The Journey*, recalls an incident wherein God sustained him by providing what he needed, he states:

I recall coming home from the office one evening and finding on the dining room table a large box addressed to me. It was from a lady in the church where I grew up whom I hadn't seen in years. I eagerly opened the box to find three suits in it. They had belonged to her son, a businessman in Arizona. All three in perfect condition. They were exactly the styles I liked and they fit perfectly. No alterations needed!

God sustains through His provisions. William Burton and his wife were missionaries in Africa. Mrs. Burton was very ill, and often expressed her longing for an orange. Citrus fruit of any kind was good for her condition. The nearest orange trees were in Dan Crawford's orchard, which was a twenty-one days' jungle trek distant from their station. As Burton left to preach, depressed that he could not satisfy his wife's longing, she began to pray for some fruit.

On his return he found that the Lord had supplied the need, for beside his wife's bed stood a full basket of beautiful oranges. Dan Crawford and his wife had been picking them half-ripe, and Mrs. Crawford had said, 'Wouldn't it be nice to send some of these over to the Burtons?' They sent an African helper on the long journey with the oranges, and he arrived and delivered them while Mrs. Burton was praying for them.<sup>56</sup> This illustration proves the claim of this paper, God is indeed a sustainer and that he sustains human flourishing through provision.

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<sup>56</sup>Archibald Naismith, *2400 Outlines, Notes, Quotes, and Anecdotes* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1967), 190.

## Christ and Debt

Christology is a reflection upon the one whom the Christian community confesses as Lord and Savior. In testifying to Jesus Christ, the community points to a particular person who lived at a specific time and in a specific place.<sup>57</sup> Who is Jesus the Christ? Throughout history, Christian theologians have sought to answer this question. In the New Testament one finds many classical interpretation of the Christ, according to scholars. In other words, there are in the New Testament different metaphors to describe whom Jesus the Christ is to the Christian church. According to Daniel L. Migliore, one of these interpretations is *Christ The Victor*. This theory develops the military metaphor found in some New Testament passages (e.g. Col. 2: 15). Migliore contends that in this view Christ is a victor over the devil and other principalities that hold human beings captives. In Migliore's words, "According to this view, the work of atonement is a dramatic struggle between God and the forces of evil in the world. In the incarnate Lord, divinity is deeply hidden. Under the veil of his humanity, Christ battles with the demons, the devil, and all the principalities and powers that hold human beings captive. By his cross and resurrection, Christ decisively defeats these powers and thus frees their captives."<sup>58</sup>

Another classic interpretation of the Christ can be found in the Anselmian or satisfaction theory. This interpretation is rooted in biblical passages that suggest vicarious suffering as the way by which humankind is redeemed (e.g. Isa. 53; Gal. 3:13). For Anselm, God and humans are related like feudal Lords and their serfs. Therefore, any act

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<sup>57</sup>*Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1994), 222.

<sup>58</sup>Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 152.

of disobedience dishonors the Lord, and satisfaction must be given. Having reflected and deliberated upon the question “Cur Deus Homo?” (Why did God become human?), Anselm concluded that Christ is satisfaction due to God on the account of the offense of sin.<sup>59</sup>

Coexisting with the victor and satisfaction interpretations of the Christ is the liberation view. This view contends that Jesus the Christ is the liberator of the poor. According to this view, Jesus the Christ has been sent by God to address the condition of poverty among humans and to set those who are captive free: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised...”<sup>60</sup> It is this view that grounds my research. My contention is simple: If Christ is the liberator of the poor, then Christ intends for humans to be free of debt. According to Migliore, Christ enters into utmost solidarity with the poor.

Jesus as liberator begins with the human Jesus and his ministry in first-century Palestine. As liberator Jesus proclaimed the near advent of God’s kingdom of justice and freedom, he blessed the poor, forgave sinners, had table-fellowship with the out cast, befriended women, collided with the self-righteous custodians of the law, and evoked the suspicion and anger of the Roman authorities with his message of liberty to the captives.<sup>61</sup>

Robert McAfee Brown, in *Liberation Theology*, regards Jesus as the one who sets free, the one who empowers, the one who makes all things new. For him Jesus liberates

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid, 152.

<sup>60</sup>St. Luke 4:18

<sup>61</sup>Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 156.

persons from unjust social structure; from the power of fate; and from personal sin and guilt. According to Brown, He liberates from the destructiveness of social structures by offering himself as a focal point of commitment more enduring and fulfilling than commitment to any social structure could ever be; he liberates from fate by demonstrating that new things are always possible, and that the dignity of human choice is not to be surrendered but to be enhanced. Finally, Brown argues that Jesus liberates from personal sin and guilt by the nature of his forgiving love, a love channeled through him by God.<sup>62</sup>

Black Theology describes Jesus as liberator, taking its cue from words attributed to Jesus in Luke's gospel, argues Harris. In *Preaching Liberation* Dr. Harris explains this view, he suggests that in Luke 4:18, Jesus is seen as the ground of liberation.<sup>63</sup> James Cone supports this view when he says "Jesus Christ, therefore, in his humanity and divinity is the point of departure for... the meaning of liberation."<sup>64</sup> Further, Cone in *God of the Oppressed* suggests that Jesus Christ in his past, present, and future, reveals that the God scripture and tradition is the God whose will is disclosed in the liberation of oppressed people from bondage.<sup>65</sup> For Cone there is no liberation independent of Jesus. Moreover, in Cone's view liberation is a human possession, but a divine gift of freedom to those who struggle in faith against violence and oppression. Liberation is a gift from Jesus the giver of every good and perfect gift, Cone states "He is the One who gave our black mother and father in slavery; an "old time religion," that moved their consciousness back to the shores

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<sup>62</sup>Robert McAfee Brown, *Liberation Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 64.

<sup>63</sup>James H. Harris, *Preaching Liberation* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1995), 30.

<sup>64</sup>James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 138.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid*, 127.

of Africa and thus, enabled them to use the resources of their heritage in the struggle for freedom.<sup>66</sup>

Blacks can fight for freedom because Jesus is the ground of their struggle. As Ernst Kasemann point out “Jesus means freedom”.<sup>67</sup> According to Joseph A. Johnson, Jr., liberation was the aim and the goal of the life of Jesus in the world. Liberation expresses the essential thrust of his ministry. The stage of his ministry was the street. His congregation consisted of those who needed him, “the nobodies of the world,” the sick, the blind, the lame, and the demon-possessed.<sup>68</sup>

Likewise, Samuel K. Roberts notes in *African American Ethics* that Jesus is the chief emissary of God. He states that “Despite the hero status of Moses, it is Jesus, the Son of God ‘de lawd’ who stands as God’s chief emissary leading the people to freedom.”<sup>69</sup> Roberts further notes an observation made by Colonel Higginson:

When Colonel Higginson, a Union officer and one who commanded the first freed-slave regiment to fight against the Confederacy, heard his men singing Spirituals, and no doubt corporately composing songs around camp fires, as soldiers have done for ages, he noted the prominence of martial images that were associated with this heroic figure Jesus. Jesus is referred to as “my soldier” at one point and “my general” at another time. Throughout, Jesus is a liberator, a when the singers expect the coming of the Messiah: “Children we all shall be free, when the Lord shall appear,” or “well soon be free, when Jesus set me free.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid, 129.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>James Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, ed. *Black Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 214.

<sup>69</sup>Samuel K. Roberts, *African American Christian Ethics* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 70.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 80.

Jesus, as the liberator of the poor, intends for humans to be free of indebtedness. Why is debt a Christological problem? First, indebtedness is problematic because it stands in opposition to Jesus' pro-stewardship position. One discovers in the New Testament that Jesus the Christ is pro-stewardship--that is, Jesus intends for humans to manage their money wisely. According to Alphin Carl Conrad, Jesus is the great *oikonomos* (steward) of the ages!<sup>71</sup> R.C.H. Lenski buttresses this conclusion in his writings when he says: "God set his good pleasure before himself in connection with Christ 'for administration'... Christ is now God's great *oikonomos*, administrator or manager. To his administration God has purposed to commit the good pleasure of what he had willed. Christ's administration is to carry the good pleasure into execution. From his eternal election onward God has connected everything with Christ, especially during this New Testament Era, during the fullness of the *kairo* or time periods."<sup>72</sup>

Christ is the great steward who intends for human beings to be great stewards as well. An example of Jesus' pro-stewardship attitude can be found in the "Parable of the Talents."<sup>73</sup> In this parable Jesus, makes clear that He expects human beings to properly manage their resources. Here, Jesus emphasizes proper stewardship and stewardship accountability.

Jesus' parable of the talents teaches about the proper stewardship, or management, of one's resources so as to produce more. It also speaks of the report on one's stewardship that must be made at the time of the master's coming, according to A.Q. Van

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<sup>71</sup>Alpin Carl Conrad, *The Divine Economy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), 63.

<sup>72</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Phillippians* (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1946), 371-372.

<sup>73</sup>St. Matthew 25:14-20

Benschoten, Jr.<sup>74</sup> From this biblical example, one concludes that if Jesus is pro-stewardship, then Jesus must disapprove of debt, since indebtedness signifies bad stewardship.

Matthew Chapter 18:23-30 contains three additional reasons that indebtedness is problematic. Traditionally, scholars have tagged this text as a parable on forgiveness. For Baker, the keynotes of this parable are to be found at the beginning and end. Baker contends that this parable was spoken in order to show that a man should set no limit to the forgiveness of injuries; In order to show this, the parable goes into the deep things of God. It shows that the motive power that can produce in man an unlimited forgiveness of his brother is nothing more than God's mercy forgiving himself. In its closing, it lays down the law that the act or habit of extending forgiveness to a brother is a necessary effect of receiving forgiveness from God. According Loyd V. Filso, the story implies God's readiness to forgive, the immensity of the wrong which man's sin does to God, and the obligation of every forgiven man to forgive others to whatever extent they need. Beyond the emphasis on forgiveness this parable speaks of debt and the consequences of indebtedness in the lives of human beings.

Following the dialogue on forgiveness, the Lord answered Peter's proposal with a parable. The "down-to-earth" story tells of a man who owed an oriental ruler an incalculable debt, stated to be "ten-thousand talents."<sup>75</sup> The story progresses until we reach verse 25, wherein the three reasons come to surface. Because of an inability to satisfy debts the servant was to lose right to own property to the extent his assets were to

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<sup>74</sup>Benschoten, *What the Bible Says about Stewardship*, 58.

<sup>75</sup>Matthew 18:24

be liquidated. Primarily, indebtedness is problematic because it causes one to lose the right of ownership. Christ intends for human beings to have of accounting arrived; the slave was brought before the king and was unable to pay his debt. The king commanded that such asset as the man had been liquidated. The slave was to be sold along with his wife and children. The story progresses until we reach verse 25, wherein the three reasons come to surface. Because of an inability to satisfy debts the servant was to lose right to own property to the extent his assets were to be liquidated. Primarily, indebtedness is problematic because it causes one to lose the right of ownership. Christ intends for human beings to have and enjoy material things of this world. It is not the will of Christ that humans lose their right to own property, due to indebtedness.

Furthermore, debt is problematic for the simple reason that it threatens family solidarity. As stated earlier, the servant's family was to be sold into debt-slavery. Because the servant was unable to pay his debts, the king threatened to sell the servant's family to compensate for his failure to pay his debts. It was common in oriental countries to inflict this upon a man of the highest station, according to Broadus.<sup>76</sup> However, the Jesus of the New Testament is depicted as one who keeps family together. When Jarius' family was threatened by the death of their daughter, Jesus healed the young damsel of her sickness, and as a result bound up Jarius' broken home.<sup>77</sup> The point here is that, Jesus delivers homes from obstacles that threaten family solidarity, because he intends for family to stay together. If Jesus intends for families have to have solidarity, then Jesus opposes debt inasmuch as it threatens family solidarity.

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<sup>76</sup>John Broadus, *Matthew* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), 391.

<sup>77</sup>St. Mark 4

Finally, debt is problematic because it brings about the enslavement of human beings. The servant in Matthew's parable was enslaved for failure to satisfy accumulated debt. Jesus refers to the man in the text as "doulos" which literally means slave.<sup>78</sup> According to Broadus, it was commonplace for a man to sell himself into slavery in order to pay off his debts.<sup>79</sup> As previously mentioned Jesus is a liberator, standing in opposition to debt, since it is debt that brings about the enslavement humans. It is the will of Jesus the Christ that humans be free of slavery. Therefore, if debt brings about the enslavement of humans (i.e. financial bondage) then Christ disapproves of it. It is the will of Christ that all humans are free of indebtedness that they might experience full-free living, a self-sustaining life, depending on no other except God.

### The Church and Debt

The church is a Servant of the people--that is, it is a community of faith called by God to serve others. As Migliore suggests "Just as the Lord of this community is a servant Lord, so is the community called by God is to be a community of servants."<sup>80</sup> According to Matthew 20:25-26, the church is not to exercise power in a self-centered way or to lord it over others, but to be ready for costly service. In addition, the church members are co-workers, helpers, ambassadors, and witnesses. Dietrich Bonhoeffer defined the church as the community that exists for others. He wrote in, *Letters and Paper From Prison*, that the church "must share in the secular problem of ordinary human

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<sup>78</sup>Broadus, *Matthew*, 391.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 190.

life, not dominating but helping and serving.”<sup>81</sup> For Han Kung, Jesus is not merely concerned about service at the table or care for the bodily needs of others, as suggested by the wider use of diakonia in Lk. 8:3; Mk. 15:41; Mt. 24:45. Nor is he simply concerned about certain special acts of love, which can also be summed up in the diakonia.<sup>82</sup> His fundamental concern is with living for others.<sup>83</sup> According to Kung, a person is only a part of the Church through service to others. According to Grenz, “the church is not limited to the expansion of the church’s boundaries. Rather, it includes sacrificial ministry to people in need.”<sup>84</sup> As servant of the people the church is not restricted to merely saving souls, but involved in irradiating the social ills that plague the soul.

The church has a rich history of service. John E. Booty in *The Servant Church* points out that the early church offered something desperately needed and succeeded in meeting the need where others failed.<sup>85</sup> Illustrating the servant role of the church J. G. Davies had this to say:

With its powerful and coherent structure, its inclusiveness which disregarded barriers of race and class, its fixed principles and at the same time its readiness to adjust itself to current intellectual ideas and popular practices, it spread steadily and surely . . . It supplied the religious hunger: it lifted men from the depth of the moral degradation into which contemporary pagan society had plunged them. It brought assurance of a personal Redeemer who liberate them from evil and from death itself.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 204.

<sup>82</sup>Matthew 25:42-44

<sup>83</sup>Mark 9:35; 10:43-45; Matthew 20:26-28

<sup>84</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 658.

<sup>85</sup>John E. Booty, *The Servant Church* (Wilton, Connecticut: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1982), 31.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

The concept of the church as servant persisted through the Middle Ages of the West. It was in the mind of Medieval popes who styled themselves ‘servant of the servants’. Booty suggest that the Medieval popes were concerned with purging the society of self-centeredness and corruption in order to create a serving society that focused on discipleship, the needy and God.<sup>87</sup>

Revivalism in America served to create servants and to build up the servant church, according to scholars. Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), a disciple of Jonathan Edwards, taught that the powers of darkness in America could be overcome by “disinterested benevolence”. According to his view sin was self-love while holiness was the cultivation of “disinterested benevolence”. For Hopkins “Disinterested benevolence” is concerned first with the happiness of others. As result Christians were to serve others by putting the needs of others before the needs of the self.<sup>88</sup>

The concept of diakonia (service) was further developed by the Social Gospel in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This movement was promoted by evangelical revivalism in order to establish social reform.

### The Black Church

The African-American Church is the most important institution in the African-American community. Its influence is so far-reaching that some scholars even say that the African-American Church is the African-American community. Since the founding of separate, independent Baptist and Methodist denominations among slaves and ex-slaves

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>88</sup>W. S. Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 235-236.

during the late eighteenth, early nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, the African-American Church has been the most dominant force of liberation in the Black community. The Black Church stands as a model of liberation and a people's determined theocracy.<sup>89</sup>

What is the Black Church? The Black Church is a liberating diakonia. In other words, the Black Church is a steward of God called to liberate humans from subjugation and thralldom. As stated earlier, emancipation has been central to the Black Church since its inception. This liberation, however, is not just the missiological thrust of the church, it is the essence of the church's identity, according to James H. Evans, Jr. Liberation for the Black church involves the freeing of the self and the disenthraling of the community. Evans declares: "the African-American Church is based on the African notion of self-in-community."<sup>90</sup> The African-American Church exists for itself and for its community. Moreover, the relationship between the African-American and the community is the essence of its diakonia.

Diakonia refers to the labor, work, or activity of the community of faith. This liberating work includes caring for widows, orphans, the poor, and the destitute. The service of the Black church is its participation in God's emancipating work on the behalf of the oppressed.<sup>91</sup> As a liberating diakonia, the Black church concentrates on the communal needs of African-Americans. Seeking to liberate Blacks from the forces of bondage, the Black church focuses its attention on the critical needs of the whole individual and the whole community, rather than on just spiritual and religious needs.

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<sup>89</sup>Harold A. Carter, William A. Jones, Jr., and Wyatt Tee Walker, *The African-American Church* (New York: Martin Luther King Fellows Press, 1991), 23.

<sup>90</sup>James H. Evans, Jr., *We Have Been Believers* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992), 135.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 137.

Furthermore, the basic ministry of the Black church is grounded in the biblical teachings of Jesus Christ. According to Gregory Reed, “The church’s concern for the whole person is anchored quite firmly in the teachings and the ministry of Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that ‘Jesus went about doing good,’ which means that Jesus had an active concern for the welfare of other people.”<sup>92</sup>

Finally, the African-American Church, as a liberating diakonia, is an extroverted institution. It is not introverted and divorced from the suffering of the external world. The Black church is not basically silent, peaceful, and harmonious - failing miserably to understand the need to abandon neutrality on issues of social, political, and economic justice. It doesn’t bask in the beauty of its bricks and mortar and the melodious synchronizing of its chancel choirs. Rather the Black church recognizes that it cannot afford to be an isolated institution emulating the privatistic, personal model represented by modern evangelicalism.<sup>93</sup>

### The Black Church and Black Theology

Black theology is the theology of the African-American Church. Black theology seeks to plumb the Black condition in light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the Black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of Black humanity.<sup>94</sup> As James H. Harris puts it, Black theology in the African-American Church is self-affirmation with the understanding that God wills Blacks to be free, equal, and at

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<sup>92</sup>Gregory J. Reed, *Economic Empowerment through Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 11.

<sup>93</sup>James H. Harris, *Pastoral Theology* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1991), 35-36.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 59.

peace with themselves. It affirms the freedom of Black people and negates that which seeks to deny them freedom.<sup>95</sup> Like Moses, Black theology speaks unto Pharaoh and says “let my people go.”

Beyond affirmation, Black theology inspires African-American survival. Its message of endurance empowers Blacks with sustenance and enables them to succeed, outlive, and continue on though the forces of negation. The survival message of Black theology counters the nihilistic threat, that is, the loss of hope and absence of meaning, which plagues the Black community. According to Samuel Proctor, Black preaching has a long tradition of sustaining strategies for change, for freedom, for dignity, for liberation, for elevation, for true humanity - but never for willful self-destruction.<sup>96</sup>

Black theology says to African-Americans that through persistence and dependence on God, Blacks can survive the onslaught of social, political, and economic oppression.

**We Shall Overcome**  
*We shall overcome,*  
*We shall overcome,*  
*We shall overcome,*  
*Someday.*  
*I do believe in my heart,*  
*We shall overcome*  
*Someday.*<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>97</sup>Mullane, *Crossing the Danger Water*, 652.

## Historical Foundation

### Geneology of Consumer Credit

For a better understanding of consumer credit, its impact on society, and the church, consumer credit will be considered in five periods of history: antiquity, medieval, reformation, enlightenment, and modernity. Consumer credit can be traced back to antiquity. As scholars indicate the Code of Hammurabi is one of the earliest and best preserved general codes. Hammurabi who reigned in Babylon from 1792 to 1750 B.C decreed the code in Mesopotamia. It consists of a collection of decrees partly concerning litigation between borrower and lenders.<sup>98</sup> According to historians, Mesopotamia was a thriving, well irrigated, economic center with it flourishing trade. Because of such, borrowing and lending were common practice, negotiated in one of the two currencies that are barley or silver. As Rosa-Maria Gelpi and Francois-Julien-Labruyere point out, the maximum interest rate for cereal loans, repayment in kind, was fixed at 33 1/3 percent per year. The rate for silver currency was only 20 percent. The law governing usury was Article 71 of Hammurabi Code. It punishes creditors who exceed the fixed interest rate by depriving them of their debt. Similarly, Articles 48 to 52 come to the aid of peasants in debt. What is gleaned from the Mesopotamia society is that consumer activity was prevalent but monitored.<sup>99</sup>

Not only was consumer credit prevalent in Mesopotamia but Israelite society as well. According to scholars after the wars with the Philistines, which fostered the

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<sup>98</sup>Rosa-Maria Gelpi and Francois Julien-Labruyere, *The History of Consumer Credit* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000), 3.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

development of homogenous and powerful kingdom, agriculture was intensified and began to show high yields. With a greater security in Israel talented farmers made a fortune by skillfully manipulating land and cereals. Moreover, during this period an aristocratic class grew rich on exterior plunder. Shifting from the simplicity of the desert to a society based on territorial structures and social differentiation local dignitaries used all the force at their disposal to satisfy their sudden need for extravagance.<sup>100</sup> They pressured the lawbreakers, stripped the poor of their goods, and the least misfortune was seized as an opportunity to lend to small farmers by making ruinous pledges from them. Local nobles would appropriate the land of insolvent debtor and sell him and his family into slavery. Thus, small holding disappeared progressively and a minority of landowners gained and controlled the wealth. However, this prosperity was short-lived. Under threat from Assyria war became permanent.

Economic decline worsens class differentiation and social problems. With succeeding catastrophes such as invasions, earthquakes, grasshoppers, alternating drought and flooding the poorest lost their patch of ground sooner or later.<sup>101</sup> Economically exhausted by war and exceptional taxes, the country was suffering from a dearth of capital. Credit in Palestine was at a much higher rate than Assyria that had an average interest rate of about 25 percent. Economic decline and social problems inevitably led to a religious backlash from prophet in the pastoral regions where economic development had been slow. Such prophets as Nehemiah spoke strongly against usury on loans and condemned the nobles in his community.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 14-16.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 17.

Opposition to credit continued with the early church fathers. Saint Clement of Alexandria, a Greek Church Father, was one of the firsts to denounce credit on the basis of Old Testament writings. More particularly, two Cappadocian Fathers, Saint Basil (329-379) and Saint Gregory of Nysse (331-400) led a campaign against wealth and attacked usury by toughening the spirit of Holy Scripture. In a spirit of revolutionary fervor for the new faith, the early Church took an extreme moral stance. The Fathers of the Latin Church also attacked usury from the fourth century. Saint Ambrose of Milan (340-397) devotes his *Book of Toby* to it. In the name of religion, he condemns loans on interest because they seriously compromise eternal salvation and are against the natural law.<sup>103</sup>

The Medieval Period marked a significant change in European society. Interest bearing loans under different forms, became an important element in economic life, and an essential growth factor, particularly in Italy.<sup>104</sup> This change undermined the old military, clerical, and rural society. According to scholars lending that enriched the bourgeoisie at the expense of the aristocracy, was violently attacked by the defenders of the old system. During this period the church was characterized as having two attitudes towards lending. It hesitated, it condemned lending, then tolerated it, then listed exceptions to the rule and generally adopted a pragmatic attitude. In fact in spite of the bans, Christian traders in towns gave interest-bearing loans to countrymen. Because of the deceptive practices of the countrymen the Conciliar and Papal bans rain down for a long time. For example, "In 1139, the second Latran Council confirmed the excommunication of usurers."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 32.

Ultimately, the church advanced from feudalism and compromised. It was during this period that the Church donned its new theological robe.<sup>106</sup>

The Reformation period was marked by division. Two main schools spoke to the topic of credit: Lutheranism and Calvinism. Being a monk of peasant origins, Luther saw no place for credit. In Luther's view credit belonged to the medieval, world a world of darkness. Therefore, in his two Sermons on Usury, he insist on the fact that loans should be free, but he stigmatized the *damnum emergens* that is payment of interest in compensation for losses suffered. He also condemned the practice of investing in constituted annuities.<sup>107</sup>

Unlike Luther, Calvin endorsed the whole idea of credit. Because of his upbringing and keen understanding of economic life Calvin knew that credit was both normal and inevitable in social life. For Calvin the Scripture did not condemn interest-bearing loans, rather excessive rates. According to scholars Calvin rejected the much-quoted passages from the Old Testament and the Church Fathers as being inadequate, because they were conceived for conditions which no longer prevailed. Moreover, Calvin believed that civil laws should recognize interest-bearing loans and set the limits beyond which they become illegal. Calvin's contribution "coup de grace" irradiated Aristotle's famous argument "Money does not beget money". Finally, Calvin promoted a practice that divine scripture does not condemn and which is necessary of a healthy social and economic life.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 46-48.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 51-53.

During the Enlightenment period the idea of credit developed significantly. This phenomenon was due to European economic expansion (particularly in the north), the increased volume of commerce and the first great spread of colonial companies. Despite economic expansion, debate continued around the controversial subject of interest bearing loans. Ecclesiastical circles remain opposed and saw it as a road to perdition by others. While on the other hand, many economists and philosophers viewed credit as a sign of progress. As a result of increased tensions, diverse laws and practices sprung up all over Europe. In some countries, interest bearing loans were banned. In such places, scholastic doctrine was attacked either openly or indirectly by lay articles in the name of orthodoxy. For example in 1745, Pope Benedict XIII, who was famous for his doctrinal rigor published the *Vix Pervent* Encyclical condemning interest bearing loans. Because the orthodox church was hardened and draped in pomp and tradition, it was not proven credible and would fail when confronted with the reality of economic facts; there dragging the church into a process of alienation in terms of social representation. The alienation led to the wide spread practice of credit use throughout Europe. In provinces where the church lost its voice, the fixing of interest rates were left to the discretion of the contracting parties.

The Enlightenment was an important period in the development of consumer credit because credit was no longer seen as a church issue but a civil issue to be regulated outside of the confines of the church.<sup>109</sup> From the nineteenth century onwards, credit was no longer a theological debate. Instead, it became an economical study. It is during this period that the principal schools of economy sought to answer to the question 'What is the effect of a change in purchasing power on the real national revenue?' Many economists

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 70-74.

and philosophers of the nineteenth century embraced credit but spoke against consumption. For example, Adam Smith and Benjamin Franklin began a New Era wherein credit was widely accepted for professional or investment purposes, as these usages were believed to be the only ones that created wealth and morality.<sup>110</sup> Another classic economist who opposed consumption was Jean-Baptiste Say. Despite the fact that he favorably viewed free market free market for interest bearing loans, he opposed borrowing for sterile consumption. Still, another champion of credit was R. Malthus. He endorsed the idea of consumer credit on the grounds that it stimulates the labor market and strengthens the national economy.<sup>111</sup>

Because of this dramatic shift in ideology, consumer credit was commonly practiced in agricultural areas in early America. It was typically used to procure horses, carts, harnesses, furniture and seeds. According to scholars, non-durable consumer items were usually paid in credit. Credit transactions, for the most part, were kept in an open-book. There were no contracts to evidence debts, nor any charges for credit services.<sup>112</sup>

Generally, customers paid up as soon as they came into some money; which was usually around harvest time. As Americans traveled westward, credit became an essential and necessary part of the conquest of the west. Credit continued to develop and diversify between 1800 and the American Civil War. For instance, the suppliers of basic necessities offered open book small loans, as well as hire purchase loans (loans that enabled the borrower to use the article bought as security for the loan). The borrower contracted to make periodic payments, which were considered as rent paid for the use of the article. An

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 89-93.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 100.

initial down payment was usually required and the trader remained the legal owner of the article until payment had been made in full. This system introduced considerable innovation.<sup>113</sup> It is important to note that during this period, repayment time was short and the initial down payment substantial.

However, after the Civil War, payback periods were extended, down payments reduced and the range of products and offers was widened. Thus, towards 1870, furniture manufacturers in the large cities in the east started hire purchase sales. As historians have pointed out, throughout this phase of the emergence of the modern United States, consumer credit enabled people to alleviate some of the difficulties resulting from the changes to their lifestyle or social bracket. It became the tool of the society on the move; thanks to which, people were able to realize –in simple, material terms- the migrants dream.<sup>114</sup>

Modern consumer credit came into being at the right time. Between 1896 and 1920's, America experienced economic prosperity. As a result, households saved less and debt became respectable. During this period, American economists came to see credit as the great catalyst in the famous melting pot. Moreover, they recognized and promoted the positive benefits of consumer credit on society. For them, consumer credit created mass production, raised the standard of living for Americans and maintained buying power, particularly when the economy slowed down.<sup>115</sup>

For the most part, African-Americans are economically marginalized from the economic arena in the United States. Discrimination in access to employment is one of the

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

most severe hardships afflicting Blacks today. The old rule of last to be hired, first to be fired, continues in effect on the whole. There also remain important occupations offered by thousands of employers who bar Blacks from all positions except menial employment.<sup>116</sup> According to some, economic marginalization has come to define the African-American experience. The marginalization of Blacks in this country had its beginning in the Slave Era. In the midst of this dilemma, black churches emerged to encourage wise economy and economic self-determination among the folk. In the south, the utilization of slave labor in manufacturing before the Civil War brought to the surface the competition between Negroes and the poor whites. There was agitation against the hiring out of slaves as competitors of white mechanics and artisans. In Georgia, the white labor class succeeded in getting the legislature to pass a law in 1845 prohibiting contracts with slave and free Negro mechanics.<sup>117</sup> This increased the need for economic uplift on the part of black churches.

Moreover, after the Civil War, Negro domestics continued to do the work classified as unfit for whites. However, in the skilled crafts, as well as mines, factories, and docks, whites gradually moved in, and Negroes were forced to give way. Several factors contributed to the marginalization of Negroes during the Post-Civil War period. First, the rise of unionism and the apprentice system; second, technological change hastened the process of substitution; third, southern white women entering industrial pursuits.<sup>118</sup> Following the turn of the century, American industrialism came into full

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<sup>116</sup>Victor Perlo, *Economics of Racism* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 93.

<sup>117</sup>E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1857), 594.

<sup>118</sup>Herbert Hill and Arthur M. Ross, *Employment, Race and Poverty* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), 10.

blossom and Blacks migrated to the north from the south, often with the financial assistance from their churches. From 1916 - 1929, Blacks moved into jobs that Native Americans or foreign-born whites did not want or had vacated as better opportunities turned up. Many of the migrant females became domestic servants in northern cities. Although some Negroes had employment, the Negro was still for practical purposes, outside of the movement of organized labor.<sup>119</sup> Thus, black churches became voices of advocacy for those locked out.

During World War II economic marginalization defined the Black experience. For example, although the shipbuilding industry on the West Coast provided relatively better economic opportunities than the Jim Crow south, Blacks were still forced to adhere to a subservient role in society. They still had to confront the realities of being Black. They were racially discriminated against within the workplace and in their communities. Within the shipyards, Blacks were confined to menial, unskilled positions, and were paid less than whites for the same work.<sup>120</sup> Throughout the 1960s African-Americans continued to experience marginalization. In 1964, “a prosperity year” Blacks confronted an unemployment rate of more than 50 percent higher than the highest rate faced by whites at any time since the great depression (9.8 percent).<sup>121</sup> During the 1960s Blacks faced higher unemployment rates, more frequent periods of unemployment in a given year, longer duration of unemployment, and more part-time, rather full-time work.<sup>122</sup> This explains in

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>120</sup>Cuahutemoc Arroyo, *Jim Crow Shipyards: Black Labor and Race Relations in East Bay Shipyard* (<http://www.mcnaire.berkeley.edu/97jurnal/arroya.html>) 2.

<sup>121</sup>Arnold Rose, *The Negro American* (Cambridge/Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, Riverside Press, 1966), 114.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 116.

part the effort of leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., who sought economic justice and empowerment through the Church-based civil rights movement.

Despite strides made in civil rights during the 1960s, in 1970, a Commerce Department report revealed that while Blacks had 3 percent of the high-paying jobs in all industries, they had only 1 percent of the high-paying jobs in high-wage industries, and their overall percentage of employment was moderately less in the high-wage industries than in all industries. In 1972, employers of 500 or more workers accounted for a total employment of 29.8 million, of whom 10.2 percent were Black.<sup>123</sup> Throughout the 80s and 90s, discrimination prohibited Blacks from moving into the employment sector and up the ladder of employment. According to William Julius Wilson, African-Americans were excluded and marginalized from employment because employers harbored negative feelings toward Blacks. Whether in terms of environmental or neighborhood influences, family influences or personal characteristics, many employers asserted that Black workers, especially black males, brought to the workplace traits, including levels of training and education, that negatively affected their job performance.<sup>124</sup>

Finally, economic marginalization fueled by discrimination has kept African-Americans out of work, at the bottom of the employment pyramid, and radically underpaid. Beyond these horrible realities, it has also created an indebted culture. Because of economic marginalization, Blacks are an indebted culture, which lacks the income required to satisfy their debts. According to H. B. Sampson, III, “an indebted culture is an outgrowth of economic marginalization.” When people are unemployed, they

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<sup>123</sup>Perlo, *Economics of Racism*, 72.

<sup>124</sup>William Julius V., *When Work Disappears* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 112.

cannot pay their bills. Therefore, since Blacks are jobless they cannot generate income necessary to pay for services and merchandise they have acquired.

Remember that one of the benefits of employment is that it provides workers with income to pay their bills. However, since African-Americans have generally been excluded, fired, or laid off from employment on a wide scale in America, most cannot acquire income that is necessary to satisfy their consumer debt. This is especially severe during periods of inflation and recession. When inflation occurs in America, most blacks just do not have enough money to bear the burden of high interest rates and when a recession occurs, blacks are 'the last to be hired and the first to be fired.' During these periods, marginalized African-Americans lack the money to pay creditors, thus Blacks become an indebted culture. Today, African-Americans marginalized and indebted, victims of consumerism. As stated previously high levels of consumer debt are threatening economic empowerment for Black Americans. According to some, consumer debt is a serious problem for African-Americans. Many live from paycheck to paycheck and make more withdrawals than deposits. Many lack the necessary teachings on how to use credit and do not take advantage of the many techniques at their disposal that can help them get back on their feet and work to repair or improve their credit rating. Tragically, African-Americans are forced to seek more credit and the credit plunges them deeper into debt. African-Americans are caught in the vicious cycle of consumer debt. Debt stands in the way of economic power, pecuniary freedom, and financial success for most Blacks. For many businesses the margin of profit is determine by the consumption pattern of the African American community. Jawanza Kunjufu points out that "African American consumers purchase 18 percent of the orange juice, 20 percent of the rice and Scotch whiskey, 26 percent of the Cadillacs, 31 percent of cosmetics, 35 percent of soft drinks,

38 percent of cigarette, 39 percent of liquor and 40 percent of the records and movie tickets. Research indicates that African Americans consumers are loyal towards “Brand name” items.<sup>125</sup>

A survey sponsored by mortgage lender, Freddie Mac of the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Association, reveals that about 48 percent of African-Americans have delinquent liens, a bankruptcy filing or a history of late payments. By comparison, the figure is only 27 percent for whites. The survey suggests that while bad credit ratings decrease for whites as they move up the economic ladder, they remain relatively stable for Blacks as they advance. The survey found:

- 1) Among those earning less than \$25,000 a year, 31 percent of whites had band credit versus 48 percent of Blacks;
- 2) In the \$25,000 to \$44,000 income range, 31 percent of whites experienced credit problems, compared to 50 percent of Blacks
- 3) Twenty-two percent of whites earning \$45,000 to 64,000 annually had bad credit as opposed to 48 percent of African-Americans;
- 4) Among those with income in the \$65,000 to \$75,000 range, 20 percent of whites were in trouble with their credit, compared to 35 percent of Blacks.
- 5) Maurice Taylor, Provost at St. Augustine’s College in Raleigh, N.C., noted that a lower percentage of African-Americans own property and invest in the stock market than whites. Only 46 percent of African-Americans own their own homes compared to 72 percent of whites.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>Jawanza Kunjufu, *Black Economics* (Chicago, Illinois: African American Images, 2002), 75.

<sup>126</sup> National Center for Policy Analysis, Available from <http://www.ncpa.org/td/economy/pd092199c>, 1.

Kweisi Mfume suggests that black folks spend \$4.3 billion dollars a year on travel, tourism, and hospitality. Despite 400 billion dollars in disposable income blacks spend 234 billion dollars a year on miscellaneous expenditures, according to Julianne Malveaux. She further illustrates black spending when she point out that black spend the following each year:

\$20 billion dollars on clothing

\$380 million dollars on men's suit

\$377 million dollars on stocking and panty hose

\$282 million dollars on CDs, records; audiotape

\$328 million dollars on film rentals.<sup>127</sup>

Black spending accounts for 10 percent of the current labor force and represent daily spending of \$641 million dollars day.

The questions arise, how has the black church historically addressed the problem of economic marginalization? The answer is simply economic uplift. Historically, the Black church helped to create an ethos of economic rationality for free and enslaved Blacks. According to scholars, it was Black churches, mutual aid societies, and the fraternal lodges that contributed to the formation of the Black self-help tradition and to the establishment of an economic ideal for the uplift the race that emphasized industry, thrift, discipline, sobriety, and long-term sublimation rather than immediate gratification.<sup>128</sup> An example of this can be found in an article published by the A.M.E. Church Review.

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<sup>127</sup>Julianne Maveaux, *Wall Street Main Street and the Side Street* (Los Angeles, California: Pine One Publications, 1999), 109.

<sup>128</sup>Eric C. Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1990), 243.

This review published many articles which stressed the “importance of economic and moral development, and self-help, and racial solidarity.”<sup>129</sup>

Black churches helped to create the first major Black financial institutions: the Black-owned bank and the Black life insurance companies. For instance, the Afro-American Insurance Society of Jacksonville, founded in 1901, began as a mutual benefit society in the Baptist church pastored by Rev. J. Milton Waldron.<sup>130</sup> As Meier and Rudwick pointed out, “the True Reformer’s Bank, the Galilean Fisherman’s Bank and the St. Luke’s Bank were all either founded by ministers or closely connected with the churches.”<sup>131</sup>

Throughout the massive migration from the rural south, individual churches and clergy in northern cities helped the migrants gain employment by announcing jobs from the pulpit or by posting them on the church bulletin board.<sup>132</sup> During the Depression years some Black churches held classes in the fundamentals of job-seeking and household economics for newly arrived rural migrants. In 1936, Dr. Robert Wesley Morgan, a Black dentist and leading A.M.E. Zion layman, taught classes in economics and household finances at both the Catherine Street A.M.E. Zion and the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Poughkeepsie.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Adolph L. Reed, Jr., *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1986).

<sup>130</sup>Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience*, 246.

<sup>131</sup>Meier, August and Elliot Rudwick, *From Plantation to Ghetto* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), revised.

<sup>132</sup>Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 248.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, 248.

Today, a great number of large Black churches have revived the tradition of church involvement in business and the economic development in their communities. Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, (America's largest Black Baptist church, with an estimated 15,000 membership) is pastored by Gary Simpson operates a nursing home, a private school from elementary to the eighth grade, a clothing bank, a credit union, and has two full-time social workers on its staff. Under the leadership of Rev. William A. Jones, the four thousand members of Bethany Baptist Church in Brooklyn raised \$1 million to open the Harvest Manor Restaurant that employs forty-four people and serves lunch and dinner every day.

Rev. Floyd Flake's Allen A.M.E. in Jamaica, Queens, has set up a church-sponsored housing corporation that rehabilitated 10 stores in the neighborhood, a housing development fund, a home care agency, a 300-unit, \$11 million complex for senior citizens and a 480-student elementary school. The Black church has always helped African-Americans achieve economic empowerment and combat economic marginalization.

How has the black church address problem of consumer debt in the black community? The prosperity gospel movement and financial management movement are growing trends that have assisted blacks in reducing consumer debt. Throughout the 80s and 90s black churches focused on problem of economic responsibility. Churches such the Crenshaw Christian Center in Los Angeles, California under the leadership of Dr. Fredrick K.C. Price taught blacks that Gods will was that they prosper and exercise responsibility with accumulated wealth. Dr. Creflo Dollar, pastor of World Changers Ministry in College Park, Georgia, also lead the way teaching blacks about financial management. Through his ministry many blacks for the first time connected God to their finances and

debt reduction. Dr. Leroy Thompson author of *Money Cometh* was another catalyst who educated and equipped many blacks with strategies for reducing consumer debt.

In closing, chapter three discussed the nature of debt from a biblical perspective. It explains the causes of debt in biblical time and the consequences for failure to repay debt. It goes on to discuss the means for debt reduction in ancient time and the reasons that debt is biblically problematic for Christians. This Chapter interpreted God as the Sustainer of Human Flourishing, Christ as the Liberator, and the Church as the Servant of God and the Black Church as Liberating Diakonia. Last, chapter three gave attention to the evolution of consumer credit and the church. It concentrated on five periods of history, namely antiquity, medieval, reformation, enlightenment, and modernity. It discussed pivotal personalities in each time period that paved the way for consumer credit in contemporary society. Last, chapter three sited historical instances when blacks were excluded from the economic arena. It also discussed the black church's intervening measures. It concluded with a discussion on the new form of economic marginalization, and how the black church has sought to resolve this issue.

Chapter four discusses the methodology and design of the model used in the field experience. Moreover this chapter discusses the research methodologies and why the researcher chose them. This chapter is meaningful because it discusses the qualitative research methodology used in the research model. It lists the researcher's basic objectives for the project. At the end of this chapter the reader should have a clear understanding of what the researcher started with.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DESIGNING A MODEL FOR DEBT REDUCTION AND HEALTH**

This chapter discusses the methodology and design of the model used in the field experience. Moreover this chapter discusses the research methodologies and why the researcher chose them. This chapter is meaningful because it discusses the qualitative research methodology used in the research model. It lists the researcher's basic objectives for the project. At the end of this chapter the reader should have a clear understanding of what the researcher started with.

#### **Methodology**

The researcher used a qualitative research design during the project. The goal of the qualitative research method was to evaluate the effectiveness of the ministry model. The aim of the research was to describe in detail what was taking place in the clinic and measure effect. The qualitative methodology consisted of a Pre-test survey and Post-test survey, biblical and theological questionnaire, interviews and evaluation. The objective of the research model was to accomplish the following:

1. To acquire personal data from the participants
2. To ascertain if participants felt a need for economic/spiritual empowerment
3. To document the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the proposed curriculum

The researcher served as the administrator and solicited qualitative data from all the participants. He chose this research method because he wanted to interact with those he studied. His goals were to minimize the distance between he and those being researched, promote personal values, use informal language, work within an emerging design, and work within context boundaries. The researcher believed that the qualitative paradigm fit his situation. He was comfortable with the ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions of the qualitative paradigm.

The training and experience of the researcher fit the qualitative design in that it only required literary writing skills and library skills. The researcher loved the flexibility of the qualitative design since it lacked specific rules and procedures of conducting research. The researcher's basic assumption was that the members of Mount Olivet Baptist Church were in debt due to a conspicuous lack of teaching. Therefore he created a three night financial clinic designed to teach members biblical, theological, and financial principle for reducing consumer debt. The purpose of the model was to teach African Americans how to take positive steps towards consumer debt reduction. He also believed that by engaging in social research he could assist the church in solving the problem of indebtedness. The researcher was very familiar with the leaders, rules, and protocol within Mount Olivet Baptist Church. As a member of the church the researcher was very familiar with the people and their money problems.

In order to secure permission to study informants in the church the researcher arranged a meeting with the pastor of the church. During this meeting the researcher discussed the problem existing in the congregation and how it could be solved with the pastor. Next, the researcher discussed the benefits and impact of such a project with the pastor. With entry secured the researcher met with the assistant pastor and Christian

Education Director of the church to discussed the time and place of the financial clinic. The researcher chose this site because it was state of the art and members were enthusiastic about learning ways to get out of debt. The church also provided plenty teaching resources, space, and equipment for teaching.

The researcher collected data by videotaping the classes. Data collection types consisted of documents as well. This enabled the researcher to obtain language and words of informants. It also was convenient for the researcher since it was an unobtrusive source of information. Surveys and questionnaires were administered during the project. The researcher administered a biblical/theological questionnaire designed to probe the biblical and theological views of participants. The researcher believed that Christian beliefs impact the way Christians address the problem of debt. The questionnaire focused on the participants views of God, devil, tithing, and debt. There were seventeen questions of the questionnaire. The questionnaire stratified the gender, age, and ethnicity of the group.

A debt questionnaire was administered by the researcher as well. This questionnaire was designed to assist to the researcher and participants in tracking the cash of participants. The questionnaire stratified the age, gender, and ethnicity of the group. The questionnaire consisted of sixteen questions. The researcher believed that in order to assist participants in reducing debt he needed first to identify their monthly liabilities.

The researcher administered a pre/post survey designed to probe the financial behavior of participants. The survey stratified the age, gender, ethnicity, and marital status of group. The survey helped in providing the income range and debt range of participants. The survey consisted of fourteen questions. Six of the questions were yes/no questions and eight were direct questions. The made sure the language of the survey was simple. He believed the simpler the language the easier it would be for

participants to read. The survey aided the researcher in finding out whether participants had patterns of payments, existing budget, and financial planning.

Here are examples of the forms used during the clinic.

**Form #1**

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: Circle Male / Female

Ethnicity: Circle Black / White / Other

**Debt Questionnaire I**

To better assess your monthly debt level answer the following questions on the debt questionnaire.

1. How much is your monthly car payment? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How much do you spend monthly on auto fuel and maintenance? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What are your monthly church contributions (e.g. tithes and offerings)? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What are your total house utilities monthly? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How much do you spend in mortgage payment? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your monthly insurance (Auto, Life, Disability, Etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is your phone bill generally speaking? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What is your rent? \_\_\_\_\_
9. How much do you put in your savings monthly? \_\_\_\_\_
10. How much do you spend in child-care each month? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What is the amount you spend on clothes each month? \_\_\_\_\_
12. What is your dining out expense each month? \_\_\_\_\_
13. What is your entertainment expense each month? \_\_\_\_\_
14. How much do you spend in groceries? \_\_\_\_\_

15. How much does your laundry cost you each month? \_\_\_\_\_

16. What is your miscellaneous expense? \_\_\_\_\_

## **Form #2**

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: Circle Male / Female

Ethnicity: Circle Black / White / Other

### Debt Questionnaire II

To better assess your biblical and theological views answer the following questions on the debt questionnaire, check yes or no to questions.

- |   | Yes   | No    |
|---|-------|-------|
| 1. Do you believe that God wants you to flourish economically?  | _____ | _____ |
| 2. Do you believe that God wants you in debt?   | _____ | _____ |
| 3. Do you believe that debt is a demonic spirit?  | _____ | _____ |
| 4. Do you believe that debt is the result of poor financial management?   | _____ | _____ |
| 5. Do you think that debt reduction is the sole responsibility of God?  | _____ | _____ |
| 6. Do you think that debt reduction is the sole responsibility of the individual?   | _____ | _____ |
| 7. Do you think that debt reduction is the responsibility of God and the individual?  | _____ | _____ |
| 8. Do you object to worldly strategies for reducing debt?   | _____ | _____ |
| 9. Do you believe in tithing?   | _____ | _____ |
| 10. Do you believe that if one tithes God will mitigate ones debts?   | _____ | _____ |
| 11. Does the Bible alone hold the answers for reducing debts?   | _____ | _____ |
| 12. Do you believe that a financial clinic which teaches both biblical and worldly strategies can bring about debt reduction for its adherents? | _____ | _____ |

13. Is it normal for African-American Christians to be indebted? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Do you think that the black churches in your community do enough to help those in debt? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Do you think that the black church is too preoccupied with requesting tithes? \_\_\_\_\_
16. Do you think the black church needs to focus on financial management? \_\_\_\_\_
17. Do you think there should be a balanced discussion in the black church on tithes and financial management? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Form #3**

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: Circle Male / Female

Ethnicity: Circle Black / White / Other

Please complete this survey and turn in at the conclusion of the workshop.

#### **Consumer Debt Survey**

Income level: (Circle one)

1. 0-\$15,000
2. \$15,000-\$25,000
3. \$25,000-\$50,000
4. \$50,000-\$100,000

Debt level: (Circle one)

- A. 0-\$3,000
- B. \$3,000-\$10,000
- C. \$10,000-\$20,000
- D. \$30,000-\$40,000
- E. Above \$40,000

Instruction: Answer yes or no when appropriate.

Marital Status: Married Single

Have you ever attended a financial clinic before? \_\_\_\_\_

How many creditors do you owe? \_\_\_\_\_

How much debt do you owe? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your yearly income? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you own a home? \_\_\_\_\_

How many credit cards do you possess? \_\_\_\_\_

How many times in the last six months have you made extra payments on your credit cards? \_\_\_\_\_

How many credit cards have you paid off this year? \_\_\_\_\_

How many credit card offers have you turned down this year? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a budget? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a financial plan for reducing consumer debt? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you reduced your discretionary expenses this year, if so how much? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do you avoid creditors? \_\_\_\_\_

The researcher also conducted interviews with participants by telephone. This provided a sense of security for informants. Informants were more relaxed during telephone conversation than they were in class.

In summary this chapter has discussed researcher's methodology and design of the model used in project. It also discussed the researcher's goals, and reasons for choosing the site for the project. His data collection methodologies were lifted up as well in this chapter. In the following chapter attention will be given to what happen during the actual implementation as well as the results of the model.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **EXPERIENCING THE FINANCIAL CLINIC**

This chapter discusses what happen during the actual implementation of the project. It also discusses the data collection methods used and the data analysis objectives of the project. The data collection methods used and the data analysis objectives will be expounded upon in this chapter. Finally the results of the model will be discussed in the chapter.

#### **Field Experience**

Having secure permission from the pastor of the church, the researcher collaborated with the assistant pastor and the Christian Education Director of the Mount Olivet Church. From such meetings it was determined that the best way to solicit support for the clinic was to make announcements from the pulpit and have interested parties sign up after the church service was over. On November 17<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> 2002 announcements were made, interested parties signed up, and obtained a letter from the church detailing the clinic's purpose as well as topics of discussion. Thirty-three applicants signed up. However out of the thirty-three applicants only seventeen people showed up for the actual clinic. The financial clinic commenced on December 9<sup>th</sup> and lasted until December 11<sup>th</sup> 2002. Each session lasted for two hours (7:00-9:00p.m.).

Each night attendance was recorded and seminars were taped on videotape. At the beginning of each class the researcher provided participants with a numbered folder which included a pencil, paper, and handouts that covered important information. The folders were used primarily to store questionnaire and evaluation forms from each individual. By numbering each folder the researcher and the participants were able to keep track of materials and obtain personal folder each session. The format for Day One was as followed:

- A. Opening Prayer
- B. Guiding Assumptions
- C. The Problem of Debt and Its Impact on the Black Family
- D. Biblical and Theological Questionnaire
- E. Word List Exercise
- F. Debt and the Bible Lecture
- G. God the Sustainer Lecture
- H. Tithing Lecture
- I. Closure

On December 9, 2002, the researcher arrived thirty-minute earlier in order to set up the presentation for the night. Along with church volunteers the researcher arranged the room so that all participants would be able view the presentation unimpaired. The researcher set up a literature table that consisted of materials on consumer debt. In addition, a word wall was posted in order to facilitate visual learning, word recognition, and comprehension. It was the researcher belief that a working vocabulary plus comprehension skills leads to cognitive development. Day one opened with prayer.

This aided the researcher in cultivating an environment of worship and learning. Prayer relaxed participants in the clinic. After greeting the assembled group the researcher discussed the guiding assumptions of the financial clinic. There were seventeen participants who attended. Next, the researcher discussed the problem of debt and its negative impact on the black family. During this segment statistical data on black debt in American society was provided. It is important to remark that many participants were shocked at the debt level of African Americans. Many could not believe it was so high. Information taught during this segment was drawn from the researcher's foundation paper. Following the discussion on the problem of debt a questionnaire was administered. This questionnaire was designed to probe the biblical and theological assumptions of the group. At the completion of the questionnaire the researcher discussed the word list and definitions posted. The researcher called off the word list and definition and had the group recite. The researcher observed that many enjoyed the recall exercise. For there was great enthusiasm expressed throughout this exercise. Many participants smiled indicating their enjoyment. It was observed that participants appreciated the word list handout. One participant commented on how the word list helped her to follow despite her inability to see well, she stated on her day one evaluation form: "Rev. Quick I really love your word list hand-out, because it helped me keep up with you despite my poor vision."

Having completed that word list exercise the researcher engaged in a biblical discussion on debt. During this time the researcher defined debt from a biblical perspective and discussed five reasons debt is biblically problematic. Content for this discussion was taken from the researcher's foundation paper. Moreover, a lecture on God was presented unto the group. Information for the discussion was taken from the researcher foundation paper. The researcher interpreted God as the sustainer of human

flourishing throughout this portion. When this was finished participants were then asked to draw a picture of God as sustainer and testify before the group about God sustaining them. Towards the end of Day One the researcher discussed 'Tithing'. Such questions were addressed: (1) What is a tithe? (2) What is tithing not? (3) Why did God require the children of Israel to tithe? (4) Why don't people tithe? (5) What are the benefits of tithing? At the close of Day One an evaluation form was administered and collected. Last, the class had prayer and dismissed. Several problems arose on day one that impacted the research process. One problem that arose was that the context associates responsible for administering the questionnaires did not show up. This problem placed the researcher in difficult position. As a result the researcher was forced to handout and collect questionnaires during the clinic. Another problem that arose was the tardiness of the participants. Seven participants showed up about ten minutes late, this force the researcher review content discussed in order to bring all up to the same point. As consequent the lesson was slowed down considerably. To counter this problem the researcher taught at a faster pace. By so doing he was able to get back on track. Still another problem that developed was participants mistakenly took home their questionnaires. Thus, the researcher informed the group on the following night to refrain from doing so again. As previously mention participants were asked to complete a biblical and theological questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed to probe the biblical and theological assumptions of the participants. Here are the results of that questionnaire:

Table 1. Results of Questionnaire 1.

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Responses</b>
Do you believe God wants you to flourish economically?	Yes (92%) No (8%) Undecided (0%)
Do you believe God wants you in debt?	Yes (0%) No (100%) Undecided (0%)
Do you believe that debt is a demonic spirit?	Yes (85%) No (0%) Undecided (15%)
Do you believe debt is due to poor stewardship?	Yes (92%) No (8%) Undecided (0%)
Do you believe debt reduction is up to the person?	Yes (61%) No (39%) Undecided (0%)
Do you believe debt reduction is up to God?	Yes (69.5%) No (15%) Undecided (15%)
Do you believe debt reduction is the responsibility of God and individual?	Yes (15%) No (76%) Undecided (8%)
Do you believe that if you tithe you will mitigate debt?	Yes (100%) No (0%) Undecided (0%)
Does the Bible alone hold the answer to debt reduction?	Yes (70%) No (15%) Undecided (15%)
Do you believe worldly strategies can bring about debt reduction?	Yes (60%) No (30%) Undecided (8%)
Do you believe that Biblical and worldly strategies can mitigate debt?	Yes (92%) No (8%) Undecided (0%)

There are limitations to this to this questionnaire. First, only thirteen of seventeen questionnaires were completed. It is important to note that 23% of the group did not complete the questionnaire. Second, those who completed the questionnaire left some questions unmarked. As a result the researcher assumed that participants were undecided about their beliefs. Based on the results of the questionnaire several observations can be made. The majority of the participants believed that God wanted them debt free, however there existed a small percentage that did not believe that God wanted them to flourish

economically. While 85% of the participants strongly believed that debt had demonic origin, 92% of the same group also believed that debt was due to poor stewardship. Equally significant was that many believed individuals bear no responsibility in consumer debt reduction. The percentage of those who believed that debt reduction was the responsibility of God alone was 10% higher than those who believed that individuals are responsible for reducing debt in their lives. The majority of the group did not believe God and the individual function as a team in debt reduction.

Despite this inconsistency many believed that biblical teachings and worldly strategies could help to reduce debt in the lives of Christians. Based on the given research, the following claims of knowledge are presented: African American Christians tend to believe that God wants them to prosper economically; African Americans Christians tend to look upon the source of their debt from a spiritual and individualistic perspective: African American Christians tend to place the responsibility of debt reduction on God than on themselves: African American Christians tend to believe worldly strategies can assist in reducing debt. On the following page is displayed an example of the lesson plan used for day one. It lists the topics discussed during the night. After the lesson plan is the tithing lesson taught to participants on day one.

## DAY ONE LESSON PLAN

(TLW stands for the learner will,)

<b>TLW</b>	Listen to the guiding assumptions of the financial clinic.
<b>TLW</b>	Listen to a presentation on debt and it's impact on the black family. Discuss as a class the statistics on black spending.
<b>TLW</b>	Complete a biblical and theological questionnaire on debt.
<b>TLW</b>	Recite the word list with the presenter.
<b>TLW</b>	Listen to a lecture on Debt and the Bible. j
<b>TLW</b>	Listen to a lecture on God as Sustainer of human flourishing. Draw a picture depicting God as Sustainer. Testify about how God has sustained.
<b>TLW</b>	Listen to a lecture on tithing.

### Tithing In The Church

1. What is a tithe? A tithe is a tenth of ones financial earnings. Leviticus 27: 30 "A tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain or fruit, belongs to the Lord and must be set apart to him as holy."
2. What is tithing not?
  - Talent: Ones skills or ability
  - Time: Ones availability for Divine Use

3. Why did God require tithes from Israel? Reverence: By giving unto God the children of Israel demonstrated their reverence towards God.
  - Relief to the poor: By giving unto God the children of Israel sustained the poor in Jerusalem who were feed from the meat in the Temple.
4. Why don't people tithe?
  - Not biblically obedient
  - Don't believe it works
  - Too busy making excuses
  - Bound by ignorance
5. Things To Remember About Tithing
  - Source of financial increase (e.g. Helps with Taxes)
  - Supportive (Funds Church mission)
  - Symbolic of appreciation
  - Spiritual Keys (It unlocks Heaven and allows Blessings to flow)

Having discussed the happenings of Day. One attention will now be given unto Day Two events. For a better understanding of what happened on Day Two an outline of events has been provided. The format for Day Two was as followed:

- A. Opening Prayer
- B. Recite the Debt Declaration Of Independence
- C. Word Wall Exercise
- D. Discussion of Budgeting
- E. Complete Confidential Agreement
- F. Complete Debt Questionnaire
- G. Lecture on Dealing with Creditors
- H. Lecture on Conflict Resolution
- I. Closure

## DAY TWO LESSON PLAN

<b>TLW</b>	Recite words on the Word Wall
<b>TLW</b>	Listen to a lecture on Budgeting.
<b>TLW</b>	Identify the different budget. type of expenditures using an example
<b>TLW</b>	Listen to a lecture on conflict resolution. strategies for dealing with creditors and conflict resolution.

Day two begin with prayer. During the prayer the researcher observed that the participants seemed to be more enthusiastic. Next, the researcher greeted the awaiting group and had them recite the Debt Declaration of Independence. Unlike the previous night the researcher seemed more energetic. He spent five minutes conveying his deep appreciation and energy. There were seventeen participants who attended. Following the greeting the researcher covered information on the word wall. After the word wall exercise the researcher commenced with a discussion on budgeting. This discussion addressed the following question (1) What is a budget? (2) Why is a budget important? (3) What are the steps to formulating a budget? (4) What are the different types of expenditures found in a budget? At this time participants were instructed to identify the different types of expenditures using an example budget. Then, the group was instructed to contrast two example budgets. These exercises were beneficial because they helped with the reinforcement of content and vividly illustrated the financial benefits of “budget adjusting.” At the end of this segment the researcher had participants sign a confidential agreement. It is important to note participants expressed reluctance through facial gestures. Therefore the researcher had to take a moment to convey the purpose and

benefit of the agreement form. Clear on the purpose and benefit of the agreement form, the majority of the participants signed the form and submitted it. There were some however who remained reluctant and suspicious to the end. Furthermore, participants were asked to fill out a survey. The survey aided the researcher in assessing the financial situation of each individual.

They helped to determine the debt/income level and financial practices of each participant. As participants filled out forms the researcher stood available to answer any misunderstood questions. Displayed below are examples of the forms used during the clinic.

### Confidential Agreement

To Participants:

This letter of agreement is to confirm that all data collected during the financial clinic will be strictly confidential and used for the sole purpose of the research project. Names of participants will not be disclosed at any time. We at the Mount Olivet Baptist Church hold your security in high regard. Any persons caught violating this agreement will be subject to lawful action.

I \_\_\_\_\_ have read this agreement, understand its content, and agree to comply with the church's policy.

Witness \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your cooperation.

Nathan Quick. Pastor

When forms were completed the researcher lead participants into a discussion of dealing with creditor and conflict resolution. These discussions focused on strategies for dealing with creditors and reducing conflict. Participants seemed to enjoy this segment!

Here are some responses from individuals:

**Participant # 1**

For now on I'm going to stop avoiding my creditors and confront my problem."

**Participant #2**

"Because of the information shared tonight I now know how to reduce conflict so that it doesn't get out of control."

Last, evaluation forms administered. collected, and the group had a closing prayer and dismissed.

As previously indicated participants were asked to complete a financial survey. This survey was designed to probe the financial behavior of the participants in the project. Here are the results of that survey. The survey found:

1. Among the group 20% said yes and 80% said no to the question have you ever attended a financial clinic before.
2. Among the group 50% said yes and 47% said no to the question do you own a home.
3. Among the group 26% said yes and 74% said no to the question do you have a budget.
4. Among the group 40% said yes and 60% said no to the question do you have a plan for reducing debt.
5. Among the group 73% said yes 27% said no to the question do you avoid creditors.

Below is a graph that indicates the debt to income comparison of the participants in the clinic. The graph illustrates that some in the clinic were in serious financial trouble at start of the project.

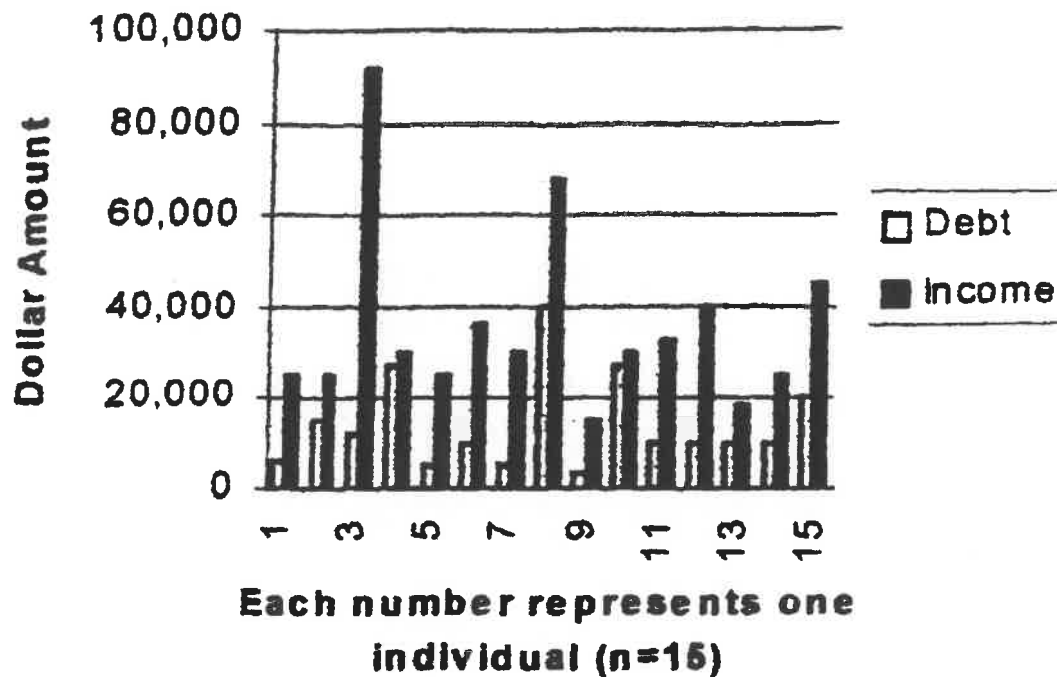


Figure 1. Debt to Income Comparison.

Displayed above is a graph that indicates the debt to income comparison of participants in the financial clinic. This information was obtained through a survey administered during the project on day two. This graph indicates that six of participants spend half or just below half of their income on debts. Six of the participants were in financial trouble and nine were not in any serious danger. Following the graph is displayed the word list and definitions chart the researcher used to convey information in during workshop on budgeting.

## Determining Your Financial Situation

### Word List

Budget	Discretionary fixed expenditures
Non-discretionary fixed expenditures	Discretionary variable expenditures
Non-discretionary variable expenditures	Repayments

### Definitions

1. Budget: a measurement standard that records one's monthly expenditures.
2. Non-discretionary fixed expenditures: items that do not change from month to month and that you cannot easily remove from the budget.
3. Non-discretionary variable expenditures: these are items that do change in amount from month to month and that you cannot easily remove from the budget.
4. Discretionary fixed expenditures: non-essential items that have a set amount and remain in one's budget from month to month.
5. Discretionary variable expenditures: non-essential items that do not have a fixed amount from month to month.
6. Repayments: items previously bought on credit and payment of outstanding credit card balances.

Next is the information shared during the session on budgeting. The information discussed gives reasons for budgeting, reasons why people don't budget, and the basic steps to budgeting. It also lists fundamental steps to dealing with creditors and solving conflict.

## **Budget**

### **The Importance of Budgets**

- A budget will show you exactly where you stand with your finances
- Helps to organizes You and Your spending
- Gives You the opportunity to see everything in black and white and end some of that frustration You feel when at the end of the month You have no idea where Your money has gone.

### **Why Don't People Use Budgets**

- Ignorance
- Don't recognize the benefits

### **Steps to Developing a Budget**

- Calculate Your Income
- Determine the Essential Expenses
- Determine the Nonessential Expenses
- Make a weekly list (i.e. cash log)
- Devise a Monthly Budget

## **Dealing With Creditors and Conflict Resolution**

As debtors we Christians must confront those whom we owe. We can not ignore our financial obligations and pretend they don't exist.

### **Basic Assumptions**

1. Debtor must confront creditor
2. Debtor must have a strategy for confrontation
3. Debt can be resolved through negotiation

### Strategy for Confrontation

1. Develop a clear objective before you contact creditor.
2. Contact creditor as soon as possible.
3. Share with creditor your willingness to satisfy debt.
4. Share with creditor your repayment plan and what's comfortable for you.

### Things to Remember

1. Stay cool
2. Stay Christian
3. Don't show your 'COLOR'
4. Concentrate on your objective and a win/win

### The Levels of Conflict

1. Problem to Solve Disagreement
2. Contest
3. Fight or flight
4. Intractable

Day two was a great day. The clinic picked of momentum. Participants departed that night feeling good about their prospects of reducing debt. The researcher felt a great sense of accomplishment and looked forward to the following evening.

Day three was the final night of the clinic. The weather was very cold that evening however the participants were still excited about concluding the sessions. Here is a layout of day three.

The format for Day Three was as followed:

- A. Opening Prayer
- B. Recite The Debt Declaration Independence

- C. Review Content Taught
- D. Discuss Basic Assumptions
- E. Discuss Traits That Lead To Debt
- F. Personality Profile
- G. Discuss Errors and Expenses That Lead To Debt
- H. Discuss Plan For Debt Reduction
- I. Closure/Awards

Day Three witnessed an increase in roll. For there nineteen participants who attended, Day Three commenced with prayer. The researcher greeted the group and had participants recite the Debt Declaration Independence. Then, the researcher conducted a brief review of content taught. After the review the group and researcher discussed the basic assumptions which to guide the discussion for the night. For example, the researcher shared: (1) Lifestyle play a major part in debt reduction. (2) Budget adjustment is essential to consumer debt reduction. (3) The financial plan of the individual determines the level of success or failure. Having shared the basic assumptions, the researcher entered a discussion on the three personal traits that lead to debt. Participants were taught that ignorance, poor planning, and the lack of self-control leads to indebtedness. Following this segment the group was then asked to fill out a personality profile assessment form. Upon completion of forms, the researcher had participants discussed their personality score. The researcher used the information shared in a discussion on the role that personality plays in spending. It was observed that choleric, sanguine, and phlegmatic personality types tended have higher levels of debt, than melancholy personality types. Following this segment the researcher lead a discussion on three common errors and three major expenses that lead to debt. This discussion really hit home. Many could identity with the presenter's

information. During the discussion many participants expressed shame and deep regret through comments and facial gestures.

Last, the researcher shared a financial plan for reducing consumer debt. Participants sat attentively during this presentation. There was much dialogue between researcher and group.

What made this segment such a success was that the researcher had a financial consultant present to respond to difficult questions. As the evening came to an end, the researcher had participants take a final exam covering content discussed. The test was voluntary. When the tests were completed and collected, the researcher thanked all participants, handed out perfect attendance and honor roll certificate and dismissed class. On the following pages is an outline of the actual lesson plan, lesson, and assessment used on day three.

### **DAY THREE LESSON PLAN**

<b>TLW</b>	Recite the Debt Declaration of Independence.
<b>TLW</b>	Discuss the basic assumptions of the financial lecture.
<b>TLW</b>	Discuss the traits that lead to debt. Complete Personality Profile Assessment.
<b>TLW</b>	Discuss common errors and expenses that lead to debt.
<b>TLW</b>	Listen to a lecture on financial planning as a means to reducing consumer debt.
<b>TLW</b>	Complete final exam.

### Debt Declaration of Independence

I will get out of debt'. I will break those chains! I will prosper! I will get out of debt! I will break those chains! I will prosper!

### Financial Planning

#### Basic Assumptions

- Lifestyle plays a major part in debt reduction in ones life.
- Budget adjustment is essential to consumer debt reduction.
- The financial plan determines the success or failure in finances
- Debt doesn't go away over night

#### Three Personal Traits That Lead To Debt

- Ignorance
- Undisciplined Behavior
- Poor Planning

#### The Role That Your Personality Plays In Spending and Types of Personalities

Basic Argument: Ones personality impacts the way one spends money.

- Choleric "Top Dog" must have the biggest and best.
- Sanguine "Inspirational" person spending is emotional in nature.
- Melancholy "Critical" person tends justifies why he must have the latest technology.
- Phlegmatic "Loyalist" is a faithful consumer who can't turn down a solicitation.

### Three Common Errors That Lead To Debt

- Participating in get rich schemes
- Giving away to people when you are already broke
- Getting financially involved in things you don't understand

### Three Major Expenses That Lead To Debt

- Big New Home
- New Car
- Unexpected Disaster

### Financial Planning Steps

- Pray and seek Gods direction and strength
- Speak deliverance into existence
- Stop spending
- Develop a budget that indicates your present state
- Develop a financial goal with steps that lead to fulfillment
- Develop a new budget that indicates your financial target and which illustrates
- Adjust Expenditures
- Change your lifestyle
- Take extra money and payoff your smallest bill. Repeat cycle.
- Get a part-time job for six months or for as long as you can tolerate it
- If debts remain, then after the six month consolidate bills through a consolidation loan with a credit union or bank:
- If all else fails, file bankruptcy

## Consumer Debt Assessment

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Name three reasons why debt is biblically problematic.
2. During the lecture on God the presenter suggested that God was:
  - A. The Sustainer of human Flourishing
  - B. The man upstairs
  - C. The wizard on the "Wizard of Oz"
3. What is Stewardship? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What is Bondage? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What is viability? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What is a budget? \_\_\_\_\_
11. List the five types of expenditures \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. How many steps are there in developing a budget?
  - G. 4
  - H. 8
  - I. 5
- 9, Name three personal traits that lead to debt. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What are the three essential ingredients in a financial plan \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Findings

African American Christians who appropriate biblical, theological, and contemporary strategies taught in Christian financial clinics are more likely to take positive steps towards consumer debt reduction. Black churches that provide African American Christians with economic teachings are more likely to witness a change in lifestyle, economic focus, and financial behavior. This segment discusses the results of the research model appropriated by the researcher.

At the beginning stages of the model implementation process many participants indicated that their debt problems were due to an excessive lifestyle, lack of economic focus, and poor financial management. However, at the conclusion of the implementation process it was discovered that the result of the model demonstrates that a significant number of participants agree with the hypothesis of this project. For participants demonstrated a change in lifestyle, focus, and financial management. In other words, they took positive steps towards consumer debt reduction. The researcher interviewed six participants from the group, In each case four trends emerged. First, all interviewed moved from overspending to conservative spending. Participants indicated during the interviews that they no longer eat out as much or spend money on unnecessary items. Here are three responses from interviews conducted by the researcher:

*Participant #3: Rev. Quick as a result of attending your clinic I'm now monitoring my spending habits. I've committed myself to eating at home. This has helped me to save money.*

*Participant #2: My lifestyle has change dramatically since coming to the financial clinic at Mount Olivet Baptist Church. At the present time I have stop eating*

*out so much. Now my family and I plan in advance when we are going to eat at a restaurant. We've discovered since doing so we have a little more money to put into our bank account. Conservative spending is the practice that my family has adopted.*

*Participant # 1: At the beginning of the clinic I felt a need to buy unnecessary items, but now I only purchase what I feel I need.*

Second, those interviewed expressed a change in economic focus. Participants were very transparent during this portion of the interview. They admitted that prior to the clinic they were unfocused and lacked the ability to concentrate on paying off their debts, However, they acknowledged that at the present time they are refocused and committed to paying off debts. Here are some responses from participants:

*Participant #3: Though I'm a financial consultant, prior to the clinic I had gotten a little undisciplined, however now I'm back on track and focused on paying off my debts.*

*Participant #2: Because of the clinic I was able to regroup. Now I'm financially organized and know what I'm working with economically and what I'm trying to accomplish.*

Third, participants acknowledged a change in financial behavior. They indicated that mistakes they use to make they do not anymore. As a result of attending the clinic they now practice a wiser economy. Here are some responses from participants:

*Participant #10: Since attending the clinic I have refinanced my home. I met with the bank as you advised and now my interest rate has been decreased, The bank granted a 4% interest reduction, thus I went from a 8% interest rate to a 4% interest rate. This has created some financial breathing room for me.*

*Participant #3: Rev, Quick at the present time I'm keeping track of my rental properties maintenance. This has helped me avoid unexpected financial emergencies. I've paid off a \$1,200 credit card. My wife and I have refinanced our home. This deal will ultimately save us \$80,000 in finance charges.*

In closing, chapter five discussed the field experience of the research model. It shared what happened during the three night financial clinic. Attention was given to the lessons taught during the clinic, questionnaire and surveys administered throughout the workshops. Problems that arose during the implementation were discussed in this chapter as well as the results of the research model.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter contains the researcher's reflections on the field experience. It offers a summation of the research model and suggests what should be tried differently during the implementation of the project in the future. At the conclusion of this chapter the reader should have a good understanding of the model.

#### **Reflection, Summary, and Conclusion**

The overall experience of the action phase of the project was an atmosphere of transparent, excitement, openness, and learning. A substantial number of participants in the project were honest about their financial situation. Most participants acknowledged their problem and need for help. None of the participants in the project expressed a "know it all" attitude. On the contrary, most were humble and surrendered in disposition. Each night was characterized by excitement. The researcher and participants typically smiled, waved hands, and shouted Amen to express enthusiasm. Some even became so excited that they testified about the goodness of the Lord. There was the sense of Sunday morning each night of the clinic.

Participants in the project were open to the information shared by the researcher. Many gave positive feedback on how impressed they were with the content shared, There was a lot of note taking by the participants each night, Some even stated that the

information shared was relevant, revolutionary, and liberating. There was a lot of learning that transpired during the course of the project. Participants indicated to the researcher how meaningful the learning experience had been. Some stated that because of the clinic's content they now know how to reduce conflict and deal with creditors.

How did the clinic impact participants? The clinic impacted the Mount Olivet Baptist Church tremendously. Members are now enlightened in financial matters. Many are inspired to take control of their economic lives and feel a sense of hope. As a result of the clinic there is discussion now in the church about sponsoring the clinic for those who were unable to attend.

The benefits of the research model in the Mount Olivet Baptist Church are threefold. First, this model help to cultivates an environment of financial dialogue. Because of the model members were given an opportunity to discuss financial matters and ask questions regarding spending and savings. This was significant because in this church most of the time economic dialogue is often centered on giving tithes. This provided a break away from the norm.

Second, this model also exposed the participants to a new way of viewing debt. Traditionally the church interpreted debt as a spirit that had a divine solution. However, the researcher provided a new interpretation of debt. Thus, enabling members to take personal responsibility for personal debt. Members were further exposed to a financial plan for debt reduction other than tithing. Because of the new exposure members were able to connect the basic problem with a practical solution.

Third, the model empowered participants. The researcher observed that by the end of the clinic participant were highly charged. There was a determination expressed by

members of the group. Many left the clinic feeling as though they could recover their financial freedom,

Having discussed the overall field experience attention will now be given to a summary of the final document, Chapter one explained the researcher's spiritual journey. It discussed the circumstances surrounding his birth, call to the ministry, and the problem in his ministry context that he sought to resolve. Then, this chapter discussed the motivating factor that influenced the researcher's present ministry ambition. Last, chapter one conducted a profile of the ministry context of which the research model was appropriated.

Chapter two discussed Washington's theory of "Economic Self Reliance," its obstacle, and its goal. Dubois' theory of "Cooperative Economic Effort" was also discussed in this chapter. King's theory of "Thrift and Savings" was mentioned in this segment as well. Next, chapter two focused on the researcher's approach to economic empowerment. It pointed out how economic empowerment could be achieved by teaching blacks ways to reduce consumer debt.

Further, this chapter discussed how blacks have always managed to survive economically despite racism, and injustice. This portion of the chapter indicated that black survival has been connected to black dependence of God. Finally, chapter two dealt with debt in the church. It discussed the two dominant Christian Movements that seek to address the problem of consumer debt. At the close of the chapter the researcher indicated how he planned to combine the two approaches to debt reduction into one approach,

Chapter three discussed the nature of debt from a biblical perspective. It explains the causes of debt in biblical time and the consequences for failure to repay debt. It goes on to discuss the means for debt reduction in ancient time and the reasons that debt is

biblically problematic for Christians. This Chapter interpreted God as the Sustainer of Human Flourishing, Christ as the Liberator, and the Church as the Servant of God and the Black Church as Liberating Diakonia. Last, chapter three gave attention to the evolution of consumer credit and the church. It concentrated on five periods of history, namely antiquity, medieval, reformation, enlightenment, and modernity. It discussed pivotal personalities in each time period that paved the way for consumer credit in contemporary society. Last, chapter three cited historical instances when blacks were excluded from the economic arena. It also discussed the black church's interventive measures. It concluded with a discussion on the new form of economic marginalization and how the black church has sought to resolve this issue.

Chapter four discussed the methodology and the design of the model used in the field experience. It discussed the qualitative research paradigm. This chapter also discussed the researcher's goals for the project and his reasons for choosing the research design.

Chapter five discussed the field experience of the research model. It shared what happened during the three night financial clinic. Attention was given to the lessons taught during the clinic, questionnaire and surveys administered throughout the workshops. Problems that arose during the implementation were discussed in this chapter as well as the results of the research model.

The researcher suggests the following revisions to the model for the purpose of effectiveness. First, future projects should establish a monthly meeting to discuss the process and review content shared. This would maintain a communication line between the researcher and participants. Also a monthly meeting would give the researcher-added time to reinforce and clarify ideas discussed during the clinic. Second, a bi-weekly conference

designed to track participant progress should be created. By measuring participant progress every two weeks the researcher will be able to detect shifts in financial behavior, unexpected crisis, and adjustments in attitudes earlier.

Third, the researcher suggests arranging monthly consultation session between participants and a professional financial consultant. This revision would aid the researcher in answering complicated questions from participants, as well as provide additional advice. Fourth, future projects should hold a spiritual empowerment service monthly, By so doing the church will create an environment of inspiration. This adjustment would maintain enthusiasm among members and even conjure enthusiasm in participants who lack inspiration. Fifth, future project might want to create a private probe. The private probe is an interview with members who demonstrate a reluctance to disclose financial information significant it the research. The private probe could be conducted by phone, in church office, or at the participant home.

In closing if the church is to continue its effectiveness and relevancy in the twenty-first century, this model suggests that it address the financial needs of the black community. It must create and appropriate a financial curriculum that teaches persons how to reduce consumer debt. It must encourage blacks to practice a wiser economy. It must promote a sober “Holy Materialism.” The task of the black church is to equip blacks with strategies for economic success and encourage blacks to take positive steps towards financial freedom.

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